My Odyssey

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My Odyssey

by Jack McLaren

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CHAPTER I

The Chinaman's Cutter

I ARRIVED in the South Sea Islands with a jerk, so to speak. There was nothing ordered or regular about it. There was not even a Customs officer to examine my luggage, or a dusky porter to carry it. I hadn't any luggage. I arrived unbeknown to myself.

It was this way. I had always wanted to go to the Islands. Like many a young man before and since I was intrigued by the idea of palm-shaded, coral-bound lands set in seas blue as sapphires, where promise of Adventure lay always in the middle distance. It was not that I had not come to grips with Adventure before, or that my eyes had never rested on beautiful tropic scenes, or that my life lacked variety; in the short space since my schooldays I had served a year as a seaman of sorts on a deep-sea sailing vessel—a "limejuicer" of the bad old school with a man-eating skipper, a "bruiser" mate, and blood on the deck every day; clerked for a Dutch ship-chandler in Batavia, Java, and left him to recite in costume the *Rubáiyát* of Omar Khayyám to the discouraging audiences of a more or less itinerant English theatrical company, which adventure almost resulted in my being gaoled for failure to pay for board and lodging; overseered native labour on a

Straits Settlement coconut plantation ; stowed away on various vessels and being forced to work a passage ; assisted, at inadequate wages, an ornithologist to capture birds and butterflies in the jungles of Northern Queensland ; slaved beneath the brazen sun of that same interesting tropic country at the making of a new railway, under a brawny ganger whose favourite occupation was indulgence in a particularly virulent and all-embracing species of sarcastic profanity whenever a man dared to revolt against the tryanny of the short-handled shovel by straightening his back.

Also, I drove mule-teams laden with tin ore from inland mining fields to the coast ; dug for wolfram and gold on my own account, finding little of either ; acted as kind of third mate and crew and cook combined of a timber-schooner running the coast ; valeted an alleged racehorse on the understanding that I would be recompensed when it won a certain race, which it didn't. Then, too, I wrote stories no editor would buy. . . .

My few years were crowded years ; but they didn't seem adventurous or even interesting. They were too near to be seen in their true perspective. The variety and the happenings were merely in the day's work of earning a living.

But the Islands ! Things would be different there, of course. Before the primeval, red-blooded life of the Islands the curious civilization of Malayia

and the Dutch Indies was decadent and unhealthy, while Northern Queensland was an unpeopled desolation, though fertile of soil and salubrious of climate. It was the Real Wild that called me, the living, pulsing, savage wild. . . .

So, when I found myself at the Queensland port of Townsville, possessed of little else than my desire for an Island life, and a Chinese fisherman asked me to captain a small sailing-cutter to New Guinea for delivery to a trader to whom he had sold it, I promptly accepted.

Right from the first I did not like that cutter. Neither did the three half-savage Kanakas who had been engaged as crew. She looked unseaworthy and unhandy. She was too thick about the waist. Her deck was warped, and in the grain of her mast was an ominous twist. When I laid her on the wind to clear the harbour's mouth she lumbered up to eight points and fell away. The trader could never have seen her, or he would never have bought her, I thought.

I calculated she would need a lot of coaxing to cover the thousand miles to New Guinea.

I was right. But for the fact that the trade wind was a following wind, I would never have reached New Guinea. I would never have reached anywhere.

Two days out the cutter developed leaks in the most surprising places. The bilge-pump became futile to deal with the inflow, and the crew took it

in turns to bale with buckets. Half-way along the Great Barrier Reef the rotten mainsail ripped to a capful of wind. When I had laboriously repaired it, the ancient stitching ripped somewhere else. The rudder was too small and made the vessel yaw about like a drunken man who wants all the footpath.

Also, her late owner had endowed the cabin with all the smells of Asia and left it overrun by large and vicious cockroaches which indulged their carniverous appetites on my toes, fingers, ears and nose when I tried to sleep.

But that the crazy craft would never have hung together on a headwind, I would have turned back and sought other means of beginning an Island life.

There was nothing for it but to go on ; so on we went, fleeing before the everlasting trade-wind day after day, incessantly baling, stitching canvas, and heaping opprobium on the wily son of Asia who had had the temerity to sell such a preposterous craft to a poor, unoffensive trader.

In due course we picked up the New Guinea coast and started across the Gulf of Papua on the long run to Moresby, the port-of-entry. The Gulf is a great wide area of unsheltered water, wind-swept and desolate, with not a single island or even a strip of sandbank to break the force of the rollers that sweep to destruction on its shores.

And, of course, it was in this very inhospitable

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place that our cranky craft chose to have a serious accident.

One night, because of the inefficient rudder swinging the bow too slowly to meet a treacherous shift of the breeze, the mainsail took the full weight of the wind with a suddenness that lashed the canvas to hopeless ribbons. To remain in that stiff seaway without a mainsail meant swamping for sure. I decided to make a fair wind of it and run under the jib for the mouth of the Mailala River which, said the chart, was four miles distant. One of the crew went aloft and gave directions to the steersman.

To find that river was a last hope. Even as a last hope I thought it a very poor one. The night was very dark ; there was only the phosphorescent boiling of the seas and, as the shore neared, occasional gleam of a fire in a native village.

But the man aloft had feline sight. In that dense darkness he picked up the river-mouth with amazing sureness ; and presently the bow began to feel a way through the breakers of the bar. I have since come across many natives with eyes that saw in the dark ; but this man was my first, and I marvelled.

The Mailala is a nasty place in which to go overboard. If crocodiles do not get you, the chances are that an outsetting current will sweep you seaward ; if the current is favourable, the surf will

have a try at smashing you up ; and if you dodge all these and reach the shore alive there is a lively crowd of savages to deal with you.

Well, I went overboard there. In the middle of the breakers the unhandiness of the rudder asserted itself for one last time ; and a roller the size of a church smashed thunderingly down and toppled us right over.

It was a complete capsize. I jumped clear, had a glimpse of the cutter turning over like a sounding whale, and struck out for the shore. By reason of that curious acoustic law which allows certain small sounds to be heard above greater, there came to my ears the wild shouting—or was it screaming —of the Kanakas. Then a spar or something crashed down on my head and I knew no more.

I awoke on the beach. The current was setting in-shore and I had missed the crocodiles and the surf—to be tossed up to the savages.

And a fearsome-looking crowd they were ! When I found myself lying on the sand with them all about me, my enthusiasm for an Island life suffered a severe set-back. It seemed to me that Adventuring was being overdone.

In the flaring light of torches of resinous bark were almost nude men with red and black teeth (the result of betelnut-chewing) and earlobes torn and distended into loops that nearly touched their shoulders. They

had great mops of oiled hair, teased wide out, and about the waists of most were broad, woven belts which gave an almost feminine curve to their hips. In their upper arms were tight-fitting circlets that bulged the flesh immediately above and below. Some carried bows-and-arrows ; some, stone clubs the shape and design of a pineapple. Women and girls, wearing only petticoats of dyed fibres which left them bare below the knees and above the waist, stood about in little groups. Most sported necklaces of dogs' teeth, and some had so outlined their ribs with white clay that they looked like strangely animated skeletons. In the uncertain light the hundred houses of the village stretched through endless coconut palms in a ghostly double row.

As I closed my eyes again I sincerely regretted that the crocodiles had missed me.

Presently I felt a hand across my mouth—a hand that smelt abominably. Peeping cautiously, I saw that a very withered and wrinkled old man was breathing into his cupped hands and holding them to my mouth.

I learned afterwards that he was the village sorcerer, commonly called the " puri-puri " man, putting into practice a novel method of resuscitating the apparently drowned. Into my lungs he was trying to transfer the breath from his own ! It was an example of curious native symbolism, of which, later, I saw a good deal.

A shout answered this second opening of my eyes, and somewhere at the back of the group a drum began to beat a sharp tattoo. The voice of a man rose in a guttural chant, deep-toned and resonant, followed by blended falsettos of women.

I thought it the end of all things. But nothing happened. For perhaps two minutes the chanting and drumming continued ; then it stopped abruptly, and the withered old man held an open coconut to my lips and bade me drink. Then I was picked up and carried to a house near by. The chanting, I learned later, was in expression of joy that I had been brought back to life.

In the days that followed the natives showed great hospitality. They seemed extraordinarily anxious for my complete recovery, also for that of the one Kanaka who had managed to reach the shore—the others were never heard of again. The house, neatly thatched and standing on high posts, was set aside for our exclusive use and furnished with more or less comfortable bunks fashioned from cloth beaten from the inner bark of certain trees and spread over a framework of narrow bamboo strips.

A chief about whose eyes were great white circles which, I discovered afterwards, indicated he had recently killed a man—and most probably eaten him—brought a dilapidated mosquito-net. To protect my head from the sun when I moved about

outside, a pleasant-faced young woman wove from narrow-bladed grasses a broad-brimmed hat, soft and pliable almost as a blanket.

Presenting food was their long suit. Every day they brought great quantities of yams, sweet-potatoes, bananas and fish. On the floor of our house was always a heap of young coconuts, opened ready for eating. A pig was killed, roasted over an open fire and presented. In order to impress on me the munificence of the gift an old chief went to great pains to explain that it was a she-pig, for which a young wife could be bought.

We feared an ulterior motive behind it all ; it is natural to fear an ulterior motive when one is unarmed, sick and helpless and many days' journey from the nearest settlement, and a crowd of cannibals insist on feeding one up. The Kanaka and I kept close to one another and at nights took it in turn to watch.

But the natives maintained their surprising friendliness. Indeed, they told us that a trader lived sixty miles along the beach and promised that when I was well enough to endure the journey they would take us to him.

" More better you sit down longa that white man's place," they advised in the curious tongue known as bêche-de-mer English. The trader had plenty " bullets longa bottle " (tabloid medicines), and " water meat " (tinned soups), and " meat bananas " (tinned

sausages)—all very good things for "one poor young feller white man who been close-up full up salt water," they said.

The puri-puri man made himself particularly amiable. He claimed he had brought me back to life and that, therefore, I was "all same picanniny belong him."

As he hardly ever left my side, I regarded him more as a guard than a "father." For hours at a time he would sit on the split-palm floor, looking at me with small, contemplative eyes, every now and then sucking at a tobacco pipe which was merely a length of bamboo thicker than his arm. He was a fearfully ugly old person, and his breast was scored with cicatrices that stood out on his brown skin like cords. Suspended from his neck, so as to hang under his arms, were various little bags of woven grass in which I guessed he carried charms and spells and general paraphernalia of the Black Art.

"I savee plenty about white man," he said once, with a note of pride. "That's why I savee talk Englis' plenty good feller proper. I been stop longa white man's village."

I inquired where.

"Port Moresby," he answered. "I been stop there two years—longa gaol-house."

White-man Government was a queer thing, he explained. A Patrol Officer had taken him away and

put him in the gaol-house because he was a sorcerer. It was the fashion of the Government to put sorcerers in the gaol-house. The Government had a most unreasoning dislike of sorcerers.

This he declared foolish and unjust. What harm was there in sorcery? he asked. Indeed, it was very often a good thing. A very good thing. Had he not by the practice of his art once ended a flood which threatened to sweep away the village? Had he not driven away a bad sickness that came to the coconut palms so that for two seasons they bore but little fruit? And had he not made a spell which caused the she-pig of Mambora, which had been barren for years, to give forth a litter of ten? Surely the white man he had saved from the sea—also by his magic—must have heard of *that*. All the villages of the coast knew of this great and wonderful thing the puri-puri man of Mailala had done.

But, said my self-adopted father, the crinkles of his face deepening to a frown, the Government put sorcerers in the gaol-house! It was very wrong of them. Of course, men died when sorcerers said they would. If a man refused to pay the tobacco, red calico, jews' harps, dogs' teeth, toyia shells or other things demanded of him by a sorcerer he deserved to die. Why not? A sorcerer must have some reward for the benefits he bestowed on the community. Truly it was hard to understand the ways of white

men. Before the coming of Gub'ment no one ever dared to interfere with a sorcerer. But now it was different. It was very different, and a puri-puri man had to be exceedingly careful not to excite the anger of those queer-thinking white men at Port Moresby.

Anyway, white men had a sorcery of their own ; my alleged father declared that at the Mission where he was sent for a month before being returned to Mailala he had seen white men kneeling with clasped hands and closed eyes and talking to nobody. And over the doorways of white men's houses at Moresby he had seen "boots belong horses" (horseshoes) nailed up. What were these things but sorcery? he asked.

On the third day the wind went down, but the sea remained, great rollers crashing tremendously along the full length of the beach. The natives said that in a few days more the surf would be sufficiently moderated to allow of the canoe journey to the trader's place being begun.

They expressed themselves as anxious to take me to the trader as soon as possible. And they seemed sincere about it—which puzzled me extremely. There was something about the whole business I could not understand. One does not expect to be treated with kindness and consideration by a crowd of palæolithic cannibals in whose power one is.

We spent most of the time on the porch of the house, watching the surf for sign of decrease in its violence. The houses were of palm-leaf thatched on a frame of mangrove saplings from the river's banks, with a narrow porch or landing in front. A crazy ladder gave access from the ground. Gable-ended, standing on high, inadequate-looking piles, it seemed as though they would never stand against a strong breeze. I did not know then that in their very lightness of construction was their strength ; they swayed to the wind instead of resisting it solidly.

There were coconut palms everywhere. Many were so close to the sea that high tides had washed away the covering sand from numbers of long, white feeding-roots and the thicker brown ones which afforded the palms mechanical support. They grew at all angles, some straightly erect ; others leaning acutely one from another as though disdainful.

The ripe fruit fell to the ground ; the green nuts —for drinking—had to be climbed for. The first time I saw a native go up a palm I rubbed my eyes in astonishment. I thought the blow on my head was making me "see things." He seemed to be walking up. His body was well away from the palm-trunk. Then I saw that he had a cane loop from one foot to the other, and a second loop in his hands, round the palm-trunk. He progressed by alternative movements of hands and feet. But the thing was

not nearly so easy as it seemed ; many times in the years that followed did I try this novel method of tree-climbing, but without success.

From the porch I could see the gardens and the women working in them. The alluvial soil of the river-flat was astonishingly prolific. Yams, sugar-cane, taro, paw-paws and other indigenous products flourished almost without cultivation. Pineapples ran riot, and all about were mango trees heavy with fruit. Banana-palms were plentiful, some producing bunches the height of a man.

It was indeed a generous and beautiful land. The wide half-disc of sea was all day long a great blue jewel flecked with white ; the river was a strip of polished glass ; behind, the flat-lands made a broad expanse which stretched to the very feet of a mighty mountain range vague in the mists of distance.

And the people seemed happy and content. The women filing home from the gardens, with backs bent low beneath full baskets slung from narrow bands across their foreheads, chanted sweetly as they came, pausing only as they passed my house to glance up with shy, brown eyes at the white-skinned man who had come so unceremoniously from the sea. Their short petticoats swayed to the rhythm of their walk. In their frizzy hair were sweet-smelling paw-paw flowers and red-and-gold leaves of the variegated croton.

And when the evening meal was done the men beat drums and sang dance-tunes while the women and girls gossiped beside the darkening sea and the round-stomached children scampered on the sand. Always when I went amongst them did their faces awaken to a smile.

And I, staring from the porch at the flickering of the fires, watching while the Kanaka slept, wondered at the meaning of it all. For one does not look for the pleasantries of life among a crowd of crude, raw cannibals, such as I knew these people to be. It seemed to be so absurdly incongruous.

CHAPTER 2

My Adopted Father's Philosophy

FROM my adopted father and another ancient person who, with almost as great persistence, attached himself to my side, I heard something of tribal law, custom and tradition. The subjects ranged from the making of cicatrices on the breasts of women as indicative of the married state to the ceremony attendant on the launching of a new canoe, which was mainly an invoking of fair winds and smooth seas for the young and gaily decorated craft.

There were hints of the processes and strange rites connected with the initiating of boys to manhood, and details of the practice of obtaining wives by purchase. I heard tales of adventurous quests to distant villages for females of definitely unrelated blood, and of totems which were group-signatures and held consanguinity in check. There was the Crocodile Totem, said these wise old cannibals, and that of the Rat, the Shark, the Turtle, the Crow, and others with symbols also taken from the land, the sea and the air ; and they instanced that a youth of the Shark could not take a girl of the Crow, because it was not so long since the people of the Shark and the people of the Crow were brothers and sisters by blood. And when hot youth was apt to forget, there was always cool old age to remind it.

It was not that I was anxious to hear these things; my great desideratum was to get safely away as soon as possible. But my gossipy friends were anxious to air their knowledge of what they fondly thought the purest English, and to be on the safe side restrained the one-sided conversation to topics with which they were most familiar.

Also, the puri-puri man desired to impress upon me his conviction that Civilization was nothing very wonderful. His two years in gaol, and various association with Europeans, had afforded him bases for comparison. He made astonishing deductions regarding the white-skinned race which so misgoverned the country that sorcerers were imprisoned. He inferred that their social system was decidedly faulty.

Was it not true, he demanded, that in big villages like Sydney, 'Merica, Townsville, and Beretani, whence came all these white men, that many went hungry in the midst of plenty? Did not the people quarrel and steal so much that strong men called policemen continually walked the villages' streets to keep the peace? Did they revere and faithfully tend their Aged? Their non-related Aged? Did they help one another as members of a village should? Of course they didn't!

Why, the Missionary had told him of one man who, knowing the imminence of a great flood, built

a large canoe with a big house upon it, placed on board a male and a female of his pigs, his puppydogs, his fowls, and many animals and birds of the jungle, and with his wives and sons and *their* wives sailed away, leaving the rest of the villagers to drown ! The name of this mean person was Moses, he thought. Perhaps I had heard of him ; most white men seemed to have heard of Moses' Ark, as the canoe was called.

Such things couldn't happen at Mailala, declared this brown-skinned preacher of the non-civilized virtues. At Mailala no man went hungry while another had food, he said : and there was but little quarrelling, except occasionally with other villages ; no stealing save the stealing of wives—which, of course, was another matter. In their communal life each individual assisted every other individual willingly and without thought of reward. And the Aged were cared for tenderly, and respected and obeyed ; for were not old minds replete with the wisdom of the years, and was not Wisdom a thing to be revered ?

I signified agreement, so did the Kanaka, for whatever might have been our private opinions, we never forgot we were in the place where dissent might have been sourly received.

He told me much of his direct and curious philosophy, did that strange old man, and he took me to a house which it was unlawful for a woman to enter.

It was a long, narrow building, much larger than

any of the others, with a great arched front terminating in a kind of spire. On either side of the doorway were wide wooden slabs at least twenty feet in height grotesquely carved and marked into crude design, with coloured earths. It stood at the further end of the village, right across the end of the street, as though commanding it. There was something sinister about its appearance. The shadow of the spire lay along the whiteness of the sand in the shape of a monstrous arrow-head.

A " Dubu " the old man called it, and invited me to enter. The people were exceedingly glad I had been saved from the sea, he said, and offered me the honour of seeing inside their Dubu.

The Kanaka begged me to stay where I was. It was a " Head House," he declared, such as there were in his own Solomon Islands, and if I went in I should never come out.

But I was coming to realize that, whatever the reason, the savages of Mailala meant me no harm ; and I decided to have a peep. It would show that I trusted them, I thought.

Leaving the Kanaka almost white with fear, I ascended the ladder and crossed the porch to the doorway, which was merely an irregular opening in the thatch. Looking back I saw a large number of the villagers about the foot of the ladder, the men, their oiled bodies gleaming in the sunshine, watching

stolidly, the women standing in little whispering groups. The whites of their eyes were curiously distinct against the brown of their faces. The Kanaka was holding out his arms to me entreatingly. My belief in the good intentions of my hosts suddenly waned ; to my excited fancy it seemed they were gathered to witness my suicidal doom.

For a moment I stood hesitating, cursing the impulse that had impelled me to mount that confounded ladder at all. Then the knowledge coming to me forcibly that a display of fear and distrust was something to be rigorously avoided, I turned to the doorway again, though irresolutely.

The Dubu was without windows, and for some time I saw nothing. Then, as the brightness of the sunlight died in my eyes, I made out a long corridor ranging down the centre, with on either side a line of tiny cubicles, in most of which burned a small and smoky fire. Before each cubicle was a hideously painted dancing mask or shield, ten or more feet in length, with a roughly painted human face in the centre. About the walls were spread, fanwise, man-killing arrows, elaborately carved and much shorter than those used for hunting and fishing. In some places were arrays of stone clubs and bows taller than a man. Near the doorway and a little along the corridor were figures of carved wood, half life-size, with in front of each a human skull crowning a stick

fastened upright to the floor. The nearest had incisor teeth of jungle gum to replace those smashed by the death-blow, for these were the heads of enemies whose bodies had been eaten. The nose, too, seemed artificial. From the stuffy gloom came the abominable smell of perspiration mingled with coconut-oil and the odour of crude, native tobacco. I guessed that in each of the cubicles was a man.

I did not go right in. It was indeed a "Head House," and I came to the sudden conviction that if I were to die I would much rather it were in the clean and open air. Heedless now of displaying my fear, I turned after that one short look and went quickly down the ladder, to the Kanaka's great relief, apparent and volubly expressed.

I don't think anything would have happened to me had I gone right in, for, as it turned out, the villagers were perfectly sincere in their friendliness. Still, there is no telling for sure. I have been in many Dubus since then, but always accompanied by trusted followers and heavily armed—which is the only safe way to explore these houses of mystery and death in the savage Gulf of Papua.

The Dubu was the especial dread of the youths of the village, for a portion of it was the place wherein they underwent their arduous transition to manhood. A definite line was drawn between childhood and the adult state. A youth was either a full-fledged man

with power to marry, the privilege of taking arms in battle, and all the rights of a citizen, or he was a mere child without any rights at all and under the immediate jurisdiction of his parents. There was no middle state.

To become a Man he had to endure two months' imprisonment in the darkness of the Dubu, have his head shaved frequently and regularly—with a bamboo razor—live on a strictly vegetarian diet, without once being allowed outside. Under pain of the severest penalties he was forbidden to speak with anyone not immediately connected with his transition. Strange ceremonies were performed about him all the time, and he was carefully taught and trained by the Old Men, advised, cautioned and instructed regarding those vital matters which the children of civilization pick up as best they may, often to their great and biding detriment. In these palæolithic wilds no boy learned the secrets of life haphazard.

While I was at Mailala several youths completed their passage to the adult state and were released. They came blinking into the unaccustomed sunlight, a nervous, uncertain group, with a suggestion of regret for their departed childhood about their manner. Their shaven heads were plastered with clay, their faces were streaked with vegetable dyes. Their strong young bodies were shining red with oil and ochre mixed. Woven circlets were about their arms,

and their waists were encircled by belts so wide and tight as to give a corset-like curve to their loins and exaggerated straightness to their carriage.

For a time they wandered aimlessly about, exceedingly self-conscious and seemingly not a little abashed by the great secrets they had learned ; then, as though realizing for the first time that they had done for ever with the trials and hardships of boyhood and that they were MEN, they grouped together and roared out the first of the village joy-songs.

A dozen drums of stretched skin and carved wood rapped out accompanying notes, and there began a chanting and dancing in which the whole of the villagers joined. And right through the night they pranced and swayed and curvetted on the hard-trodden sand of the village street, the guttural singing of the men blending with the high voices of the women and the pulsing of the drums in a grand, proud pæan which swelled above the crashing of the surf. It was the song they sang and the dance they danced when a man-child was born, was the burden of what one of my withered and loop-eared friends said as he sat on my porch smoking his bamboo pipe and watching with approving eyes. For had not these youths been born into Manhood ?

The girls passed through no such travail. It seemed that *their* education mattered but little, females being inferior creatures useful only as garden-workers,

wives and mothers. A woman was a possession to be bought or sold, just as a pig was bought or sold. And the Feminist being a product of Modernity and having, therefore, no place in my adopted father's system of social ethics, these stone-age women were content with their lot. They claimed no equality with the lordly males, neither did they dream of mentioning their Rights. They didn't know they had any Rights.

The marital morality of the Mailala folk was distinctly man-made, as, indeed, were all their laws. Before marriage, when she was no one's particular property—or everyone's—a girl could do very much as she pleased in the way of love affairs—a condition which would seem to have resulted in numerous pre-wedlock children, but did not, because of the abortive properties of certain herbs, one of which was the convolvulus, or beach-vine.

After marriage it was different. While a man could galivant around as much as he pleased, his wife was compelled to walk the straight and narrow path of fidelity. She was her husband's private and personal property, for him to do with just as he was inclined. He could, if so minded, lend her to a friend, and she could do nothing but acquiesce. But the punishment was death if she were discovered straying from the path of wifely rectitude on her own account.

More than once did the puri-puri man hint that he would be only too pleased to accommodate me with a temporary wife. He was married in quite a large way, having accumulated six ladies, and he went so far as to indicate one whom he considered would be a suitable companion for the handsome young white man who was his adopted son. And it was no mean offer, for the girl was the youngest of his retinue—a finely built creature, seductive of figure, with soft brown skin, large eyes and pleasant features.

"All the same, I been look after you good feller, eh?" he said when, pleading that I was not yet recovered from my immersion in the sea and the blow on my head, I declined with thanks. "When you meet Gub'ment feller you tell him that people belong Mailala are very good and kind people."

And I promised I would sing their praises to the skies.

On the seventh morning a canoe was run down the sand into the water, and it was announced that the time had come for the journey to the trader's place. I liked the look of that canoe even less than I had liked the look of the Chinaman's cutter. It was a lengthy, narrow craft of two hollowed logs lashed three feet apart, with a platform of split bamboos covering the space between. I thought it an extremely fragile and inadequate craft for a sixty-mile journey.

But the Kanaka assured me it was all right—he

was himself a skilled canoeman, he said—and I stepped on to the platform. The paddlers were already kneeling in the places inside the logs.

The villagers came to the water's-edge to cry and shout farewells ; and as we slipped out from the beach the puri-puri man waded out, extended his hand in white-man fashion and once more asked me to remember how well I had been treated by the people of Mailala.

" Then Gub'ment come good friend long-a we feller," he said with seeming irrelevance.

The surf was still running fairly high ; but those canoemen knew their work, and we reached the outside broken water without great difficulty. Then we headed east along the coast.

It was sunrise when we left Mailala and we reached our destination some time before daylight next day. Twenty hours for a journey of sixty miles ! It sounds slow ; but it must be remembered that our only power was man-power.

The paddlers worked in relays, the craft never stopping the whole time. The Kanaka and I, to stretch our muscles, sometimes took a turn at the paddles. For food and drink we had brought green coconuts, boiled yams and yams baked in ashes, half-cured fish, and bananas. Everyone ate just as he felt inclined. Though I had nothing in the world but a very dirty cotton singlet, a pair of disgracefully

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ragged trousers, and a hat of woven grass, I enjoyed that canoe trip. I revelled in it. It still stands out as one of the bright spots in my life. It was like a picnic. I was very young.

The trader, a man named MacGowan, was very pleased to see me ; I was the first white he had met for five months. I slept most of the day of my arrival ; but that night we sat up till near dawn—talking and talking.

He was a most interesting and intelligent man, who had been years in New Guinea and knew just about all there was to know of the natives and their ways. He had begun life as a journalist and had attained the sub-editorship of a London daily paper when he set out for the South Seas in the yacht *Ariadne*, a vessel about which many queer stories are told, including one concerning the extremely isolated island of Tristan Da Cunha and a cargo of Bibles and condensed milk which was never delivered. The *Ariadne* had been brought to England by a certain notorious adventurer for the purpose of enlisting a party of young bloods with the desire and capital—particularly the capital—for an extended trading and knockabout tour of the Islands.

On reaching Australia, however, the young bloods were sufficiently disillusioned to refuse to go any further, and the tour was abandoned. All returned to England save MacGowan. He had set

out for the Islands, and to the Islands he would go.

He went to New Guinea and never left it. The great, little-known island, with its mystery, romance and adventure, intrigued him as it has intrigued many another ; and the sub-editor became a permanent trader.

His station was a most beautiful place, standing on the shores of a little bay, with his house hedged by everlasting croton bushes and, along the beach, avenues of tall coconut palms with yellow canias about their feet.

From MacGowan I learned why the cannibals of Mailala had been so friendly. They had promised to be good. A few weeks before my dramatic arrival a Patrol Officer, backed by a detachment of armed Native Constabulary, had visited them, taken away for imprisonment some of their number who were concerned in a recent wife-hunting raid, and issued stern warning of the drastic punishment that would most certainly be theirs if they persisted in their naughty ways. On the puri-puri man, as a responsible person, had been laid the duty of keeping the villagers in order.

I had arrived before the effect of the warning had worn off, and it was because they wanted to impress the Patrol Officer on his next visit with proof of the excellence of their behaviour that I was treated so considerately.

My Adopted Father's Philosophy

I promised myself that if ever I met that Patrol Officer I would express my heart-felt satisfaction and thanks that he had visited Mailala before and not after my arrival. I never met him, for a little later he was speared to death by quarrelling, far-inland tribes to whom he was trying to take the peace of civilization. His passing was mourned by whites and natives alike as that of one of the straightest and bravest dwellers in a wild and savage land where such qualities were common possessions.

I spent a happy month with MacGowan, getting an insight into the business of trading for copra—the dried " flesh " of coconuts—and feeling the first promptings of desire that such an occupation should be mine, though hardly daring to hope for realization.

Then one bright morning a ketch sauntered in and—her master announcing that if we hadn't any money for fares, well, it didn't matter—the Kanaka and I, dressed in clothes from MacGowan's store, made our regretful farewells and took passage for Port Moresby.

CHAPTER 3

A Ship with Two Captains

BEFORE MacGowan's place had faded out of sight astern, I made my great resolve. I *would* become a trader. Besides being a colourful and romantic life, with the trader a king holding absolute sway, it seemed an easy road to fortune. All MacGowan did was pay tobacco and things for coconuts which a half-dozen men at ridiculously low wages then turned into copra. The natives did all the work ; the trader took all the profit. MacGowan had mentioned the number of tons of copra his station had produced in the last year ; it sounded a tremendous lot and I had no doubt that in a bank in some civilized place a large sum stood to his credit. Any sum seemed large to me just then, for all I had in the world was the hope that at Moresby I would receive a letter from the Townsville Chinaman containing the £5 I was to be paid for delivering the cutter—which, seeing I had not delivered the cutter at all, was certainly a slender hope.

It wasn't much wherewith to start a trading-station. Undoubtedly there were difficulties ahead. But reflecting that I had been stuck before and won through I drew the inference that if I were stuck again I would win through once more. There is no faith like the faith of youth in the future. And

so, while the ketch bumped through the lumpy seas, I allowed To-morrow to look after itself and lived only in To-day.

The vessel was bound from the region of the great Fly River with copra, general cargo, and newly recruited labourers for coconut—and rubber-plantations somewhere away to the eastward. She was of about sixty tons, tall-masted, blunt of prow, a little ungraceful in her lines—as faithful craft often are—and she carried two captains.

For, being the size she was, soulless regulations demanded that she had on board a man with a master's certificate—and Harry, her owner and splendid navigator, had no such document bearing his name, despite that he was one of the ablest sailors who ever threaded the watery labyrinths of the Thousand Isles. It was just that he " couldn't be bothered with them footling examinations."

The formal captain was a shipmster famed in his youth as one who had added to the safe passage of the seas by discovering and charting certain important reefs ; but now he was an old man broken by the vicissitudes of time and fortune. His name appeared on the ketch's papers, and it was he who applied for clearances and reported to Customs and Health Authorities. But he was captain only in port.

At sea, away from unromantic officialdom, his status vanished. The vessel came under the sole

despotism of Harry. It was Harry who willed her destinations, found her positions, laid her courses. It was Harry who arranged for cargoes, decided on beaching for repairs, compelled obedience from the chocolate-skinned crew.

Though the ketch had two masters, she served but one. And the old captain who was not a captain save in a port-of-entry stared across the waters with eyes that still had something of the sea in them and said not a word. In the declining of his years he was pathetically thankful for even this paradoxical haven. It was broken old age assenting meekly where youth would have flared in revolt.

A kindly, good-natured adventurer was Harry, alive with the joy of living, and one of the best-known characters in those waters. There were few islands he had not visited, few reef-bordered passages through which he had not guided a keel. As we made a long leg and a short one along the faithful south-east wind he told me tales of his wanderings. I heard of comic-opèra Tongan kings whose treasury of State contained only empty bottles ; of bêche-de-mer fishing about the inner waters of the Barrier Reef, the greatest coral formation in the world, which fringes the north-east coast of Australia for a thousand miles ; of tolls, near the line, where fresh water was so scarce that for months on end the people drank and washed in coconut-milk ; of long canoe-journeys up little-

frequented rivers in search of sandalwood and cedar ; of a brave white woman who, attacked by savages in the absence of her husband, fled to sea with her suckling child in the half of a square iron tank, where some time later they were found dead from thirst in three inches of rain water which had fallen too late.

He spoke of speedy ships and laggard ships, of cyclones and calms ; and in the manner of all true lovers of the sea he spoke of them as human things possessed of individuality and charm. And he spoke of the Call of the Islands.

Once you heard that Call, you had to answer it, he said. He had tried to turn deaf ears to it—and failed. Four times had he cast the sand of the Islands off his feet, finally and for ever as he had thought ; and four times had he returned. At Moresby they said he was making a habit of it. When you were in the Islands, it appeared, innumerable people of your own skin and tongue, theatres, pretty women, good cooking, horse-racing, and all the rest of it, looked jolly fine. But somehow, when you got amongst these things it wasn't the same. A man soon got fed up with city life. For one thing there was too much hustle. You'd see a feller twirl round a corner on one leg merely to buy a packet of cigarettes. And there was always such a thumpin' noise goin' on, and fellers trying to take you down for all you'd got, and the people seemed unreal—artificial

like. And very soon the pretty women didn't seem so very pretty, and you got tired of young skirts and old faces, and the theatres began to look cheap and tawdry. That sort of thing was no good to a feller accustomed to knocking about with easy-going cannibals, and after a while you'd be nosing round the shipping offices seeing about a passage back, and calling yourself a goat for ever having left. It was the Call getting to work.

"You take my tip and get out of this country as soon as you can," Harry advised me, "or every time you go away you'll be hearing the Call and be always comin' back. It's damn' unsettlin', I can tell you."

For two days and nights we drove across the wind with sloping decks and sails swelled full. The long, low line of the shore was a ribbon of darkest green edged with the everlasting white of curving sandy beaches. Here and there the thatch of a village showed brown amidst the gleaming green of palms ; at times, standing close in, we saw the people themselves and perhaps a cheery waving arm. Once, near the estuary of a river, we passed a fleet of fishing canoes, the spearmen standing upright with weapons poised. In the bright sunlight they were like gods of living bronze. Once we passed a canoe fair-winding under the press of a great mat sail shaped like a lobster's claw. It was a "Lakatoi," said Harry, going west to trade clay pots for native sago.

And then we came to Lese, a straggling village built on a sandbank across the mouth of a mangrove-fringed river, with a flagpole and a trader's house on its seaward beach.

In response to a flown signal we hove-to ; and presently the trader came off in a canoe. He was a little, sharp-featured man, with skin much yellowed by fevers, wearing an antiquated felt hat, a cotton singlet, and a loin-cloth ; and he was volubly and obscenely angry.

We had come from the westward—had we seen anything of his cutter ? It was always the way with these (censored) niggers. You couldn't trust 'em out of your sight. If he had his way he'd do to them (sundry non-repeatable things). He'd show 'em !

He explained that ten days ago some up-river villagers had brought down a canoe-load of copra, for which they wanted dogs'-teeth in exchange. They had all the tobacco, fish-hooks, calico and other foreign trade they needed for a time. They would take dogs'-teeth for the copra, and dogs'-teeth only. They were insistent about it—which was a way the brutes had, said the trader. It was no good telling 'em he had no dogs'-teeth and trying to get 'em to take something else. Not a bit of good. It was never any use trying to argue with a crowd of thick-headed niggers once they made up their minds. There was nothing for it but to bundle a crew into his

cutter, give 'em a caddy of tobacco and send 'em to some of them there western villages to try and trade up a few strings of teeth. It wasn't every day that canoe-loads of copra went begging. They must have wanted them teeth dam' bad, or they wouldn't have picked up all them nuts, the lazy swine—there must be a big dance or something coming off shortly. Well, they were waiting, and if the cutter didn't turn up soon they'd get fed up and canoe the copra to the trader at Yule Island, and he'd lose the lot.

Harry gave him a whisky. No, he said ; he hadn't seen the cutter. But then he'd kept well out to sea most of the way across the Gulf, and the cutter might have been in the mouth of one of the rivers. However, he had a few strings of dogs'-teeth right here in the cabin, and if the trader cared to take them at the usual rate of £1 a string, he was welcome to them.

The trader accepted promptly ; then, filling his pipe with coarse-cut trade tobacco, he hitched up his loin-cloth in the manner of a native, squatted on the flat top of the cabin-house, and asked Harry who the blazes I was and where I'd come from ; and on hearing my story and intentions declared me various distinctly unmentionable kinds of idiot if I didn't get this trading nonsense out of my head and clear out of the country at the first opportunity, trading being the last occupation on God's earth and composed of nothing but worries, and New Guinea a country

where young fellers only went to the dogs in double-quick time, what with drink and fever and native women and all that.

Then he discussed what he said was an unexplainable fall in the price of copra and a coincidental and equally unexplainable rise in the cost of trade-goods, which circumstances he credited to the swindling propensities of the wholesale merchants, who did as they pleased with a poor, out-back trader and kept his nose to the grindstone all the time.

After which he told of recent happenings in and about his station ; of a native girl suiciding by throwing herself from the top of a coconut-tree, because of her lover's attentions to another woman ; of the lover's remorse driving him screaming into the bush, from where he had not yet returned and perhaps never would return ; of a new copra-house which was being built to replace the old one which was so full of borer insects that it threatened to collapse at any time, though it had been built only a year ; of crocodiles taking pigs and dogs with a frequency which so disturbed the natives as to keep them from the gathering of coconuts, and so compelled the trader to sit up two whole nights trying to get a shot at the saurians ; of how the wife of Charlie, the Raratongan mission-teacher at the next village but one along the beach, had almost died in giving birth to her latest baby.

"Charlie got properly flurried when things began to go wrong," said the trader. "It ain't usual for native women to have any trouble ; they'll have a baby in the morning and be out working in the gardens in the afternoon, as you fellers know. No trouble at all. Charlie sent me a message to come along quick, and bring any medicine I had. Now, I didn't know anything about this kind of thing, and I didn't like the idea of it at all. But what was a feller to do ? I'm the only white man in these parts, and the niggers think a white man can do everything. Besides, the nigger Charlie sent told me how the woman was suffering and—well, I got out me portable medicine chest and a few things, had ten minutes with the book of directions—which dealt with everything from toothache to heart-disease in quick-and-lively fashion—and went along to Charlie's place. She was very bad, and in awful pain—everything was wrong, y' understand ?—and there was a crowd of women from the village sitting round, crying and going on. I shut 'em up, chased 'em outside and swore I'd skin the first that made a noise. I chased Charlie out, too ; his nerves was all adrift, and he would have been in the way. Then I got to work. There wasn't any time to lose. I don't want another job like that. Not me. It was tough, I tell you. The book said a lot about anti—anti—what do you call 'em ?—anti-septics, and instruments with names just as long.

The only antiseptics I had was a bottle of rum, the only instruments a sheath-knife. Nice sort of outfit for a job like that ! But that woman was game—gamer than any man I've yet struck—and between us we done it ; and soon I was able to go out and announce to Charlie, who was dam' near off his head by now, ' Both doing well, thank you ' ; and then we swigged the rest of that there bottle of rum in one long drink. We needed it."

Then he got down off the cabin-top, tossed the strings of dogs'-teeth down to his waiting canoeman, and climbed over the rail, mingling his thanks to Harry with further distressingly frank details of the terrible punishments deserved by cutter-crews who fiddled away their time dancing in the villages and monkeying around with the girls. Watching the canoe head through the opalescent water, the paddles gleaming as they rose, I resolved that *my* trade-room would always contain a store of those much-valued strings. It seemed crudely unromantic that a king should have to worry about things so absurd as the teeth of departed dogs.

Harry's crew were natives from the eastern end of New Guinea—young men, perfect of torso and strong of limb, with pleasant features and enormous heads of teased-out hair. Like the Mailala folk their breasts and upper arms were scored with raised weals in a blend of ornamental markings and mysterious tribal

signs ; but in addition they had on their foreheads blue tattoo marks in designs like swastikas. They had been much with white men and had a certain familiarity with civilization and its ways. One told me, rather proudly, that once he had captained a "kerosene steamer," meaning thereby a motor-boat ; another that once he had been a member of a police-boat's crew and had visited various little-known parts of New Guinea, and adventured in many strange places.

They were devoted to Harry. To them Harry was the embodiment of all the manly qualities. They revered physical strength and prowess ; and Harry was big and strong and cunning with his strength. Also, he was a skilled sailor—an exceedingly skilled sailor, they said ; and they told me stories of his skilfulness—of his fighting vicious little local storms called "gubus," of running under full sail in winds which would have caused another man to reef right down, of his taking all kinds of plain and fancy risks which, because of his skilfulness, were not risks at all.

I liked those mop-haired eastern men better than I liked the recruits. There were forty of them, all from villages about the banks of the Fly River. Considerably taller than most Papuans I had seen, they were strong and well built. But they were ugly. Their hair was crisp and curly and close, and was

reddened with coral-lime, and in their ears were studs of mother-o'-pearl. Their skins were intensely black ; the old captain, who was a captain only in port, uttering the only joke I ever heard him utter, declared that charcoal would make a white mark on them.

They were obviously village sick. All day long they lay about the deck and on the hatches, watching the shore and murmuring sad-sounding village songs to the accompaniment of a piece of wood tapped on the deck in lieu of a drum. Most times they smoked cigarettes of trade-tobacco wrapped in scraps of newspaper, begged from the whites on board, and chewed betelnut with much sucking of saliva-wetted sticks dipped in lime-gourds slung beneath their arm-pits. But always were their eyes fixed on the shore, their link with home. . . .

The idea of working a year in the big-feller coconut-gardens of the white men wasn't so attractive now. A lot of bad and saddening things could happen in a year. They would return to find some of their friends and relatives dead, maybe, and much-desired girls sold to other men. The value of the trade-goods for which they would exchange their wages at the Moresby stores faded in the face of these things. As the distance from their homes increased the more surely did the glory of the future change to menace.

Two days from Lese we came to Yule Island, which

sprawled between the points of a wide-mouthed bay like an outsize in whales resting on the sea, and made the finest shelter for shipping in those regions ; and here I had my first sight of an island mission—La Mission de La Sacre Cœur—a group of white-painted buildings, refreshingly European. But my look was only a look in passing, Harry explaining that if we anchored, some of the recruits, now their destination was near, might seize the chance to escape. One had to be careful when near the end of a journey, he said. Realization that they were a long way from home came forcibly to them then.

" There's two hundred and fifty miles between here and their villages," said Harry, " and the chances are they'd go into the cooking-pots before they got very far. Yet, they'd risk it if I gave 'em half a show. I've lost recruits that way before."

So on we went, never anchoring or shortening sail ; and with all this easting the flat lands crumpled up and the mountains came closer to the sea. The ten-thousand-feet dome of Mt. St. Mary's stepped from the obscurity of distance to gaze on the waters and all about like a wondering giant. Victoria, a third as high again, stalked up, a crown of cotton-wool clouds about her regal head, and respectful little subject-hills about her feet. Other peaks and spurs and knobs, many ragged and untidy, came straggling along to look. Foothills, greatly daring, crept right

to the water's edge. The Interior had come to sudden cognizance of the Coast.

For three full days, under the watching of the hills, we threaded a narrow, reef-strewn area sprinkled with sandbanks menacingly awash, and palm-clad, beach-girt islets sitting the water as though afloat, and dots of mud and young mangrove trees which were islets in the making.

We sailed over tapestried coral grottoes, softly clear through a dozen translucent fathoms. We skirted tree-edged river-mouths and bays green with the green of shallows. We weathered long, low sandy points which thrust seaward like thirsty tongues. We danced right up to the edge of the outer reef where the deep-sea rollers everlastingly creamed and crashed. Thinking but little of what the future might hold, I rejoiced with the heedless joy of youth and thought that life was good.

And then at long last we rounded a place where one of the inquisitive foothills made a steep high headland, and entered a splendid land-locked harbour. With sudden remembrance of dogs'-teeth, copra and a Chinaman's £5, I saw the white roofs of Moresby blinking in the sun.

CHAPTER 4

Adele

TWO months later I again passed the inquisitive foothill which formed part of the harbour's gateway—this time in a lugger of my own chartering, and a trader outward bound.

For luck had been mine in the queer little town that bestraggled the rocky, barren slope of a hill and its valley with rough, unmade streets bordered by wide-verandahed houses built high off the ground for coolness, a few European stores, a single—mainly galvanized iron—hotel, and Government offices indistinguishable in location and design from dwellings.

The Chinaman's £5 was ready and waiting, the mail steamer having arrived the previous day. Then, after finding a position as seaman aboard a trading vessel for the Kanaka, I obtained for myself a labour-overseer's post on a local plantation, where I intended to stay and save my wages till I had sufficient to set up in business as a trader—which, to say the least, threatened to be a lengthy process.

But it was not to be. My luck went further than that. My faith in the future justified itself once more. For I discovered that a certain Moresby storekeeper was always ready to take a chance of opening and extending trading in the more distant parts ; and an interview resulted in his agreeing to

allow me credit for an outfit of stores and goods. I resigned my job, mustered a crew, obtained a lugger and set sail for the western flat lands.

And my luck still held good, for my exploring of the Gulf of Papua's shores resulted in my discovering the village of Adele, at the mouth of one of the numberless streams which form the great Purari Delta.

Adele had all the essentials for the establishment of a successful trading station—abundant coconuts, shelter for shipping, friendly natives anxious for trade. Everything was happening just as I wanted it to happen ; and I had visions of myself enthroned as a copra-king with a chain of stations along the beaches to which endless processions of eager natives brought innumerable coconuts wherewith to barter for the contents of my trade-rooms. It seemed I couldn't go wrong.

The Adele folk gave me a great reception. As I stepped ashore they came to the water's-edge and expressed delight that a white trader was come to live amongst them. For a long time they had hoped for such a thing, they said. They had far more coconuts than thy needed for their own eating, but no means of disposing of them, save to occasional passing vessels. And they badly needed the delightful things a trader would exchange for the nuts. Had I red calico, tobacco, camphor-wood boxes, sheath-knives, leather body-belts with shining buckles ?

I had—and many other things besides, I told them. Whereat they expressed further pleasure ; and that night they sat up for hours beating on their drums and singing songs which they told me were songs of joy that a white man was come to live at Adele.

Next day, when my goods were landed and placed in the house which had been set aside for my temporary occupation, I conferred with the head-chief regarding a piece of land on which to build my home-to-be. He was a tall old person, entirely nude save for various ornaments of woven grass and a wide belt encircling his waist ; and he was quite a gentleman in manner and general demeanour. He indicated that the whole resources of the village were at my disposal, and that my wishes were law. If I would be pleased to indicate the piece of land I required, it would be mine forthwith. And regarding the building of the house and other buildings—well, that could be safely left to him.

I thanked him and referred to payment for the land. He shook his head. I pressed the matter ; and he said that it was not a matter of payment at all, but if I cared to make him a present—well, he hadn't had a smoke for so long that he'd forgotten when it was. Whereupon I gave him a pound of tobacco, a box of matches, a tin of preserved beef, a jews' harp and a sheath-knife. I felt that generosity such as he had exhibited could be met only by similar

generosity. I felt I should make a good fellow of myself. I made a mistake.

That head-chief became a nuisance. For months after I started trading he used to drop round to my house with all kinds of footling and foolish things—a cockatoo's feather, a piece of a headdress, fish-scales wrapped in banana leaves, a cast-off grass petticoat belonging to one of his wives, any old thing that came to his hand. And he would solemnly present them to me, and remark that he would not take any payment—wouldn't dream of taking payment—but if I cared to make a present, just as he was making a present, well, he would consider it discourteous to refuse. Till a succession of stern refusals finally choked him off, he was the chief bane of my life. He had translated my generosity at our first meeting into inability to refuse anything asked of me.

The land I selected was a rectangular block of maybe half-an-acre, back a little from the river and the reach of possible floods, and about three hundred yards from the village. A hundred or more natives set to work on the building of my house. Some went up the river and to the swamps and brought down canoe-loads of mangrove-timber and nipa-fronds for the thatching. Others scooped out the postholes. They scooped them out with their hands, the sand being soft and loose, and scorned the shovels I offered them. Women and girls laced the fronds for the

walls into great, mat-like oblongs. Men and youths swarmed over the framework like flies. They worked with astonishing facility, and apparently no one overseered or gave orders at all. It was as though each person had always a certain duty to perform in the building of a house, and he did that and no other.

Completed, it was a neat and substantial place, sixty feet square, with two rooms, a half-dozen slab windows, four doors, a wide verandah all round, and standing on piles so high that a man could walk with ease beneath the floor. All the time I lived in it I found the stout thatching impervious to the heaviest rains—and it *could* rain in those particular parts. There was not a nail in it ; all joints were lashed with split jungle-cane toughened by fire. It was produced wholly from local materials. It was built in a week. The total cost was £5 worth of " trade " goods.

I lost no time in starting trading, about which there was no complicated finance. It was all a matter of simple barter. The villagers brought the coconuts tied in pairs by strips of their own husk and slung across a stick carried on the shoulders of two men and spread them on the ground before the house. Sometimes women brought a few odd nuts in bundles, or in pliable baskets slung across their backs, often with a tubby, naked baby perched on top, its fingers twined in its mother's hair. From

A PAPUAN COCO-NUT PLANTATION

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up-river villages the nuts were brought in canoes.

The ruling rate was one stick of tobacco for twenty nuts. A stick was worth about a penny and formed the basis of exchange. Being recognized as currency, its size and weight was fixed by Government regulation.

I engaged a number of villagers to open the nuts, remove the white "flesh," and dry it in the sun—which operation completed the simple process of copra manufacture. They worked at the making of the copra without the least idea of what it was used for. I think they thought white men more or less mad to buy such common and plentiful things as coconuts and pay men to dry the water out of the "flesh."

On the other hand, they would have exhibited no surprise had I told them that three-fifths of the world's population used products of the coconut every day of their lives—that that evil-smelling, dirty-looking copra contained somewhere about six hundred essentials and bases used in chemistry, medicine and food-production. They would have merely remarked that it was "fashion belong white man," and let it go at that. They were an incurious crowd.

Labour was cheap. Ten shillings a month in terms of "trade" was the ruling rate. My cook received a half-crown extra because he was a chief. He suffered no loss in rank or dignity because he

cooked. He cooked for a white man, and that made all the difference. Though a red, raw savage, most ferocious of appearance, he was at heart almost child-like.

I had to train him from the very beginning. He had the most weird ideas of cleanliness. He hadn't any at all, as a matter of fact. His favourite method of cleansing a spoon was to rub it round with a saliva-wetted thumb. His loin-cloth—a more or less unclean length of calico from my store—was frequently used as a dishcloth ; to see him standing naked while he dried the dinner-things was a sight to be treasured.

For a long time he was a dreadfully incompetent preparer of food. He suffered from a conviction that it was a mistake to eviscerate a fish before cooking it. In making tea he was in the habit of boiling it steadily for an hour or so—" Make him good strong feller," he would say, seeking applause for his thoroughness. I once told him to make a " damper "—a kind of scone baked in the clean ashes of a very hot fire. Hearing cries of consternation, I ran out to find him trying to dam back an awful mess of flour-paste, ashes and sand which ran all about the earth floor of the kitchen. He had mixed the flour and water far too thin and *poured it on the fire*, putting it out. I made the dampers myself after that.

The coconuts came in abundantly. Six thousand nuts were necessary to make a ton of copra. Yet for

the first three months I made two tons[1] a week. There was always a flock of natives about the room I used for a store. People from other villages brought nuts in canoes and departed happy in the possession of fish-hooks, mouth-organs, jews' harps, tobacco and camphor-wood boxes. These last were a great "draw." Well-constructed, with brass-bound corners and dovetailed joints, they had in the lock a bell which tinkled when the key was turned. Often the purchaser of a camphor-wood box would sit down in a nice shady place and turn and turn the key till the lock was broken and the bell ceased to tinkle. Corkscrews, also, were in great demand—not for opening bottles, but for twisting in the mopped hair which was a man's crowning glory. It was common to see a stalwart youth strutting vainly with his fuzzy head festooned with corkscrews.

Next to these the thing most in demand was calico—plain white, flaring red and printed. The women tore it into strips and wound them about their hair, or arranged them into tiny streamers to hang from their armlets. The men used it for loin-cloths. A man in a new loin-cloth was exceedingly proud of himself. The men were by far the more decorative, and set the fashions.

But I had one lady customer who was inclined to reverse this rule. She was the native wife of a Samoan

[1] Worth £25 a ton at Moresby.

mission-teacher in spiritual charge of a village forty miles along the beach ; and one day she and her husband appeared at Adele in a canoe.

The Samoan, Biblically named Ezekiel, a stout and stately individual, wearing white to distinguish him from common men, explained in English of his own that he had come because it was only right and proper that one man of standing should visit another. Then he added confidentially that his wife wanted to buy something from my store. Women were always wanting to buy things from stores, he said. It was their fashion, and he had no great objection as a rule. But in this case it was different, and it was only because the lady had nagged at him with great persistence that he had brought her at all.

For, it appeared she had got hold of a fashion-plate magazine and was anxious to have a costume similar to one of those depicted.

Ezekiel had a glimmering of an idea that the costumes were expensive. If I had such a dress in stock would I please remember that his salary was only £30 a year, out of which he had to purchase food and other necessaries, and as from one man of standing to another do him a good turn by choking the lady off?

She was a young woman, good-looking for a native, and pleasing of manner ; and she was pathetically disappointed when I told her gently that I did not

stock fifty-guinea Paris costumes. Cross-legged she sat on the floor of the store-room, slowly turning the pages of the fashion magazine, looking longingly at the attitudinizing fashionably dressed ladies, a little frown creasing her forehead that my stock should be so incomplete. I think she thought me an inadequate, footling kind of trader.

She compromised at last by buying some cheap flowered print to convert into a " Mother Hubbard " dress—an atrociously ugly one-piece garment which fastened at the neck and hung loosely down, concealing all semblance of form. I knew that in it she would not look nearly so pleasing and handsome as she did in the waist-to-knee fibre petticoat of her race.

Ezekiel thanked me privately and declared himself my everlasting friend.

Some time after he returned to his village he sent me a letter. It was written on various odd scraps of paper, one of them portion of a milk-tin label—

" Dear Sir Master :

" I write to you for you to send letter to the Governor for me when the store-ship comes next time, for you are white man and mightbe he not like to read letter from me. Please sir you tell the Governor sir that the natives of this place have come no good. They come proper bad. You know what they do ? They steal two pig and four small puppy-

dogs belong to me. They belong to me sir. I ask them natives to give back that pig and puppydog. I ask them plenty times. But they no listen. They laugh. They laugh plenty times. I tell them in church that if they not give back that pig and that puppydog they burn in big fire bye and bye and they finished altogether. But they not take notice. They laugh again sir. So I come angery. They are no-good people. Please send to me one hat belong finger (a thimble), because my wife have tore that new dress and wants to sow him up, and some write-paper and trousers belong letter (envelopes). I love you, my wife love you, God love you.

"Yours truly friend, Ezekiel."

"You please tell the Governor sir that the natives here have steal altogether prayers book and altogether hims book for to make the cigarette."

Theiving was not common. During the whole of the time I was at Adele I had only one experience of it. I had gone to an up-river village, where I hoped to open up a trade, leaving my cook in charge; as he was a chief and loyal I thought everything would be all right.

He was the first to meet me on the river-beach when I returned; and he was greatly distressed, almost in tears.

My store-room had been raided by some of the

young bloods while he slept, he wailed. They had pushed a way through the thatch of the wall and taken many things. His heart was sore that such a thing had happened while he was in charge, and he bitterly regretted he had slept in the village instead of on my verandah as instructed.

Armed with rifle and revolver I yarded up as many of the people as I could. They were sullen and obviously ill at ease, and not a man spoke when I demanded return of the goods and identification of the thieves. Many carried bows-and-arrows and clubs, and but few women were present—a sign of brewing trouble.

I spoke again ; and the crowd moved restlessly. They muttered and fingered their weapons. Watching for a rush, I kept my rifle at the " ready." I was glad I had the wall of a house at my back.

Suddenly my cook-cum-chief plunged into a long harangue. He rebuked the villagers. Why had they stolen from this good white man who had come to live amongst them and supply them with so many desired trade goods ? he asked. Truly it was a bad thing to do. Why, if they offended the good white man he would go away, and they would have no more calico, camphor-wood boxes, and tobacco ! Did not they want more of these things ?

At great length he dilated on the immense advantages bestowed upon Adele by the presence of a

resident trader. It gave them a standing above other places, he said ; it made them important ; and he pointed out that plenty of other villages would be glad to have this trader from whom the people of Adele were so foolish as to steal and thereby drive away. And he drew a harrowing picture of those other villages casting scorn on the people of Adele as being foolish people who knew not how to keep a trader amongst them.

The last bit was surprisingly effective, and I was furnished with an example of native sensibility to scorn. Before the chief had finished speaking, a number of the crowd slipped away, and returned presently with the thieves—four youths with great mops of hair.

The older men lectured them and forced them to telling where they had deposited the stolen goods. Then my ideas were sought regarding suitable punishment.

I had an inspiration. I would humiliate the youths. I would hold them up to ridicule. I would inflict a punishment that would cause them to hide their heads in shame. Not for a considerable time would they vainly strut the village street affectedly unconscious of admiring female eyes. Their pride and vanity would be destroyed as the strength of Samson was destroyed.

With due impressiveness I gave my orders. For a

moment the crowd stood still, wondering ; then with sudden appreciation of the idea a dozen rushed forward and held the struggling youths till my cook brought a pair of scissors from the store and carried the sentence into effect. And the result was as efficacious as I had hoped, for, ridiculous and all as it may seem, I could have devised no severer punishment in a case like this than—a close haircut.

CHAPTER 5

The First Visitor

WITH the unheeding exuberance of youth, I revelled in those first few months at Adele. Apart from the fact that I was thriving financially, I thrilled to the knowledge that I was truly a South Sea trader living in a thatched house amongst mop-haired, brown-skinned people, several days' sail from the nearest white settlement. My desire for life in the palæolithic Wild had been translated into vivid accomplishment. The romance and adventure which had been my dream—as it is the dream of all full-blooded youth—was all about me. Sitting on the verandah of my house, looking at the village strung along the bank of the white-beached river which wound through the green of the palms like a ribbon of silver, I liked to fancy myself the hero of the best-loved adventure stories of my boyhood strangely come to life. Hardship, discomfort, isolation meant nothing to me in those early days. The amenities, conventions and inglorious security of civilization I regarded with scorn. I thought of those who spent their lives in crowded cities as unfortunates who had been denied the spice of existence. Compared with such I felt myself indeed a king.

But there came a time when glamour receded before familiarity—which is the tragedy of romance—

and I reached full understanding of the fact that even the regal state had its trials.

There was the little matter that at any time my savage friends might take it into their heads to kill me. This, too, despite their possession of qualities which showed that in some respects at least civilization was retrogressive. Many were too uncivilized to tell lies, for instance. It had never occurred to them. No man went hungry while another had food. They cared for their unrelated aged and sick with wonderful solicitude, merely as a matter of course and quite unaware they were exercising a virtue. They didn't know there were such things as virtues. They were not given to subterfuge or deceit. If one man had a grievance against another, he declared it with commendable directness.

On my first visit to one of the up-river villages, where I hoped to extend my trading, a withered old man with hair so twisted up and arranged above his ears that he looked a blackfaced Mephistopheles, sprang from the tiny porch of his house, shook a sheaf of arrows in my face and gesticulated to the effect that he would kill me. My followers disarmed him, demanded explanation, and learnt that the old man's failing faculties had caused him to mistake me for one of an exploring party which, many years before, had accidentally caused the death of his son. When told of his mistake he swore everlasting friend-

ship with me. As he was whole-hearted in enmity, so was he whole-hearted in amity.

Yet I could never be sure of them, for they were possessed of instincts at which I could only vaguely guess and over which they had no control. At all times they were liable to give expression to certain queer impulses which were their age-old heritage, and causelessly murder the stranger in their midst —to regret it deeply afterwards, no doubt. All of which in time became exceedingly disturbing and made it necessary I should never wander far from a firearm, and many a night caused me to awaken and sit up, revolver in hand, listening for repetition of the imagined creaking of the verandah boards under a stealthy, naked foot.

There was the difficulty of making them understand the relative values of the different trade items. In return for a string of twenty nuts a man would ask a tomahawk, or a hurricane lantern, or a camphor-wood box ; a woman would select maybe a length of calico, a mirror, and a pair of scissors as adequate exchange for a similarly small number of nuts ; and they would shake their heads in complaisant non-understanding when I explained that whereas their coconuts were worth one stick of tobacco, or one penny, the things they asked in exchange were worth five shillings or more. Values based on monetary comparisons were beyond them as abstract and complicated ; a

good deal of tact and careful explanation was needed to prevent them getting the idea there was a swindle in it somewhere. At first this kind of thing was amusing ; with frequent repetition it became irritating.

As a way out of the difficulty I instituted a coinage of my own. From empty kerosene and biscuit tins I cut discs the size of half-crowns and with a die laboriously contrived from a piece of iron stamped them with an X—because it was the easiest letter to manufacture. I made some hundreds of them ; then I destroyed the die in case its accessibility might tempt to unauthorised coining, and set out to elevate Barter to the realm of Commerce. The discs, I explained, were " money," such as white men used amongst themselves. Money made trading simple and understandable and prevented disputes. Each " coin " was worth six sticks of tobacco, would be exchanged for coconuts to that value, and was redeemable for trade-goods. This, I said, was a better method of buying and selling than the cumbersome fashion of direct exchange.

For a long time they did not take kindly to it. It was an innovation, and they didn't like innovations. Through their lives ran a curious, though in some respects natural, conservatism ; as they had always done, as their fathers had always done, was good enough for them. Also, much of their dislike of my new system was due to the fact that in their hearts trading

was as much a matter of exchange of presents as a matter of real business. But I won them to my way of thinking in the end. They even took to saving their " money."

Their method of exchanging the " coins " for goods was curious. A man would come into the store-room, walk round examining the stock for perhaps half-an-hour trying to make up his mind what it was he wanted, and then come to the counter and from a woven-grass bag carried about his neck produce a " coin," lay it down and, pointing to the particular kind he desired, remark : " Calico." When I had cut off the requisite length he would put it carefully away and after due consideration bring out another " coin " or two and say : " Fish-hook "—and so on, receiving and paying for the articles one at a time till his purchases were completed. By this means he knew always exactly how he stood and was never liable to buy more goods than he could pay for.

Most of those who saved their " money " were young men who had contracted to purchase wives. In terms of actual cash a young wife cost about £2—a large sum considered in terms of coconuts worth only twenty a penny ; in most cases it meant many weeks of hard saving. Each father laid down a definite price for his daughter—so much tobacco, so many fathoms of calico, a sheath-knife of a certain length of blade, a bottle of scented hair-oil, maybe, a mouth-organ, and

a dozen other things. A tally of their number was kept by notching a piece of wood ; and their purchase was often an all-day matter which kept me from my other work and made me wish for a slump in the marriage rate.

Another of the trials of my life was the fact that a thatched house had its own peculiar disadvantages. The palm-leaf of the walls became the abiding-place of snakes, rats, spiders, wasps, scorpions and other obnoxious creatures, most of which developed a predilection for crawling through or under the mosquito-net and exploring my bed and myself. It is disturbing to the dignity of a king to be walked upon by strange insects.

Sleep without a mosquito-net was impossible. While all day long mosquitoes were in sufficient numbers to keep one interested, at sundown they swarmed up in real earnest. I always had my evening meal well before dark ; and my first duty on retiring was to go carefully round the inside of the net with a lighted match and singe to death any of the buzzing hordes that had slipped in while I was entering. Sandflies also were numerous ; on dead calm nights, when an ebbed spring tide left the river-mouth and beaches a broad expanse of half-dry sand and mud, they flocked up in their millions, and being so small as to be almost invisible went easily through the close mesh of my cheese-cloth net, to my great and abiding discomfort.

Then there were the troubles to digestion and general health that came from too regular consumption of meat done up in tins, and yams, taro, sweet-potatoes and other native produce almost wholly starch—a diet which in lowering the power of resistance increased the incidence of malarial fever. I had a good deal of malaria at Adele. It was not a healthy spot ; the swamps round about gave forth miasmatic vapours and bred in large quantities the anopheles, or disease-carrying, mosquito. As a safeguard I used quinine, as had been recommended to me by various persons at Moresby and elsewhere. I pinned my faith to quinine. I devoured it. I took it regularly. I took it in the tabloid form. I took it in the powdered form, rolled in scraps of tissue paper like a pill. And it didn't make any difference. I contracted the fever just the same. Malaria became one of the chief banes of my life.

Then there were times when all kinds of food were scarce. During my second year the store-vessel—a small steamer—failed to arrive at her usual time. My stores being low, an anxious look-out was kept for the thread of smoke that would announce her coming ; but the days lengthened into weeks without a sign—till at last my European foods were completely done. Troubles do not happen singly in the Wilds any more than they do elsewhere. It was a bad season in the Purari that year ; the yam, taro,

sweet-potato and banana-crops were poor. Also the fishing was insignificant, it being the time when coastal fish sought deep water or went far up-river to spawn.

The natives were sympathetic and sought explanation of the steamer's non-appearance. One man had his own peculiar idea of what was wrong. Many years before, he had been taken to an Australian city by the Rev. Chalmers, the famous missionary known affectionately all over the islands by his native name of "Tamate," who was killed and eaten by the people of Goarabari, a village some distance to the westward of Adele. The native was not at all impressed by the wonders of the white man's land; the railways, electric lights, shops, and all the rest of it meant nothing to him. In his own incurious fashion he put these wonders down to "fashion belong white man" and let it go at that. But one thing *did* impress him; he could not understand how the people lived, seeing that no man appeared to grow anything. In all his travels of the city he had not seen a single food-garden. Truly it was puzzling to know whence they obtained their food, he said.

Wherefore he suggested that the mysterious source of supply had become exhausted and that, therefore, the steamer had nothing to bring! He was quite surprised when, after six weeks, a ketch arrived with supplies and the news that the steamer had run on a reef, broken her back and become a total wreck. In

fact he was not a little aggrieved, as any man is aggrieved when the logic of his conclusions is suddenly proved fallacious.

In this time of need I was driven to eating the flesh of crocodiles and raw sago. The crocodiles were captured by a method exceedingly thrilling. I think it was the most thrilling sport in the world. One of the man-eaters being discovered lying on the river-bottom, numbers of the villagers surrounded the spot in canoes and set up a tremendous yelling, shouting, and beating of the water with paddles, till it was considered the prey was so stupefied by the unusualness and intensity of the noise as to be unable to move.

It was then the thrill came in. A man carrying the looped end of a long length of jungle-cane went overboard and swam down. He went calmly, almost casually, swimming with slow, easy strokes, as though the single-handed capture of the most dreaded creature of the rivers were but part of an ordinary day's work. There was a moment of dreadful suspense as he approached the motionless beast. In the glass-clear water his every movement was plain. The shouting and yelling and splashing died down. Not a man spoke or moved. Then the diver slipped the loop about the crocodile's head and darted to the surface ; and the canoemen hauled on the other end of the cane and towed the prey to the shallows, shouting

and yelling in the pride of capture, or it may have been in the relief of apprehension.

Though I never knew an accident happen in this dangerous sport, I noticed that almost always it was an old man who did the looping. The natives probably considered that if the crocodile *should* grab the looper it was merely the inevitable forestalling itself. Which certainly sounds economical.

These people had a curiously steadfast belief in the power of unusual noise over crocodiles. From the verandah of my house I was one day watching a number of women and girls net-fishing in the waist-deep water of the river-mouth. Suddenly a crocodile's snout appeared—to vanish with ominous swiftness. A moment later there was a scream, a struggling and a scatter ; and presently a girl was carried ashore with a terribly mutilated leg. While I dressed the wounds as best I could, a score of men, be-feathered and painted, waded to the spot and for half-an-hour yelled weird songs and beat sharp tattoos on drums. Then they returned and stated there was now no danger, as the crocodile was so frightened by the noise that it would never return. Heedless of my declaration that, on the contrary, the beast having tasted blood at that spot would probably come back for more, the women and girls resumed their fishing at once. And, strangely enough, there was never another casualty there.

Crocodile-flesh was vile food, tough and disgustingly rank. Only when exceedingly meat-hungry could I touch it. But I preferred it to the sago. I didn't like the way it was made. Few people would, once they witnessed its manufacture as practised in the Gulf of Papua. The natives felled the sago-palms, of which there are numberless thousands in the swamps about Adele, and split them into longitudinal sections, which were then placed one at a time at such a slope that water flowed easily over the inside pith. A woman then beat the pith with a flail-like arrangement while her husband poured on water, the flailing breaking up the pith and the water carrying away the refuse. The stuff remaining was then worked up into a sodden, cheesy substance. This was the sago.

So far, it doesn't sound extraordinarily objectionable. But while the flailing and working-up were in progress betelnut was freely chewed. Betelnut makes a pink saliva and necessitates much spitting. Many varieties of sago in their crude state are also pink. Betelnut-chewers are not in the least particular where they spit. . . .

But all these matters were mere circumstances compared with a loneliness that came over me at times—a terrible, devastating loneliness which made even the temporary companionship of some one of my own skin and speech the most desired thing in the whole world. As the next best thing I made

companions of the people who live in books. But for the fact that I had well formed the reading habit, I would never have stayed at Adele so long as I did. I arranged with the captain of the supply-vessel to bring me all the books, magazines and newspapers he could garner on his three-monthly round of Government, mission, and trading stations ; and I read and re-read every word of the varied and motley collection he brought, even to the back-page advertisement concerning the lady who was once obese but now was thankfully slim. With my catholic and all-embracing taste my library came to range from the *Critique of Pure Reason* of Immanuel Kant to the emotional adventures of a Victoria Cross heroine. To be without reading matter I considered the worst disaster that could befall me. Once when this happened I took to reading and translating the labels and advertising pamphlets wrapped about patent medicine bottles and tins of condensed milk, which, being printed in three languages, gave me a limited and thoroughly unreliable knowledge of French and German.

And besides making companions of the people who lived in books, I created characters of my own. I wrote stories, as I had written stories before I began my adventuring in the Islands. I wrote any number of them, and sent batches away with each trip of the store-ship. And in due course the store-ship brought

them back—with editors' regrets. The number of regretful editors in the world was astonishing. I almost felt sorry for them.

But I could cheerfully have sacrificed my whole gallery of literary companions, my own creations included, in my joy when one day the natives shouted that a white man was coming. I was to have a visitor ! It seemed wonderful.

He was an old man—an Englishman—who had a trading station forty miles along the beach, which distance he had covered sitting in an easy-chair, shaded from the sun by a canopy of palm-leaves and canvas, in the centre of a broad-beamed double canoe propelled by a half-dozen naked savages.

He was " just dying to have a yarn with somebody," he said, as he stepped on to the beach, and had "just took it into his head to come along." He had heard from natives there was a white trader at Adele.

I led him up to the house, delighted as a child with a Christmas present. I looked forward to a long and interesting chat about things of the outer world, to a complete break for at least a few hours from the things of my daily life.

I was to be disappointed. That old man didn't " yarn " in the ordinary sense. Neither did he " talk shop " or dilate on the at-the-moment low price of copra, as I expected he would. My first visitor

proved a very strange man indeed to meet in such an out-of-the-way place.

He talked books. He talked nothing but books. He too was an omnivorous reader, and the habit of a lifetime indulged through long periods of solitude had developed in him good measure of artistic appreciation. He was a *littérateur*. He let himself go on a dozen literary subjects, reviewing, expanding, explaining.

My library—or some of it—delighted him ; he confessed that his visit was mainly due to a rumour he had heard that I had a considerable number of books. There was a battered copy of *Almayer's Folly* on my shelves. It was the first work of Joseph Conrad's he had seen ; and it so captivated him that most of the night he sat up in his mosquito-netted bed reading it by the light of a hurricane lantern and declaiming passages across the room to me.

" Sometimes I think the only people who really live are those in books," he said at breakfast, a far-away look in his deep-set, thoughtful eyes, " and that all others are dead."

I returned his visit some time later and found that his thatched house was a library. Each of the rooms was lined with books, all with their edges and bindings carefully varnished against the ravages of a book-destroying insect peculiar to tropic seas. And such books ! Amongst them were complete editions

of Scott, Meredith, Hardy, Stevenson, and Dickens, translations of Boccaccio, Casanova, Flaubert, Anatole France, Romain Rolland, and Renan's *Vie de Jesus*, also works dealing with the history of literature and biographies of writers ancient and modern.

And the end of those treasured books ! A year or two ago their owner died and his effects were consigned to his relatives by a steamer which got into difficulties and ran so short of coal that the cargo was drawn upon for fuel. The old trader's beloved library went to help feed the furnaces. . . .

CHAPTER 6

Civilization of a Sort

IN many respects the natives were children with the bodies of adults. They were concerned for the satisfaction of their immediate wants only. They lived in the present. The future was merely a present to which they hadn't caught up, and they did not believe in worrying about it before they arrived. So it was that when almost all possessed the trade-goods for which they had once ardently longed, need for gathering large quantities of coconuts no longer existed. Enthusiasm at having a white trader on the premises suffered a tremendous waning. Trading fell away to nothing. Camphor-wood boxes, calico and corkscrews became a drug in the market, and a little tobacco the only thing in demand. I had little or no copra for the ketch when she called on her three-monthly round.

And then, just when there seemed no escape from ultimate financial disaster, the natives discovered other immediate wants. At first occasionally, then with increasing frequency, I was asked for " native trade "—boars' tusks, nose-bones, armlets of toyia shells, necklaces of dogs'-teeth. Dogs'-teeth after all ! And request consolidated into insistent demand. But, like the Lese trader, I had none of these things. I was faced by the necessity of obtaining them if

there was to be any recrudescence in my trading.

Wherefore, learning that the people about the lower reaches of the Fly River had more "native trade" than they knew what to do with, but were chronically short of tobacco, sheath-knives, hand-mirrors and the like, I packed a quantity of the multitudinous contents of my store-room and on the next visit of the ketch took passage to the island of Daru, intending there to obtain a smaller vessel for the journey up the river.

Daru was a disc of sand and coral studded with the evergreen vegetation of the tropics and edged mostly by a ribbon of beach which was grey on dull days and white and glistening and scored with the tracery of palm-shadows when the sun shone brightly. It stood back a little from the vast flatness of the mainland and lay in all its gem-like beauty in a setting of water so blue and shining as to be a jewel itself. Here and there the thatch of native dwellings showed brown amongst the palms, and up from the end of a stumpy jetty which thrust across the water like a thumb, stood a cluster of buildings plainly European.

For, as port-of-entry for Western New Guinea, Government headquarters of a district half the size of England, and a mission and trading centre, Daru was a place of civilization. It wasn't much of a civilization; the white inhabitants totalled seven-

teen ; the public buildings, traders' stores, church and residences were of wood and galvanized iron when they weren't of palm-thatch and mangrove timber ; and there were no streets, or rows of shops or hotels. But to me it was a Hub, a Metropolis, a Grand Centre. After the isolation of Adele seventeen whites all in one place seemed a tremendous crowd.

But they were a crowd different from other crowds, being a crowd acutely conscious of isolation—which sounds paradoxical but isn't. Sense of isolation is not confined to single individuals. People can be lonely in numbers. The seventeen whites of Daru were cut off from the outside world only a little less completely than I was cut off at Adele. In so far as I represented a break in the everlasting sameness of their days they appreciated my visit just as I had appreciated the visit of the book-worm trader.

No vessel being available for immediate charter, I for two days revelled in the unaccustomed society of people of my own skin, hearing the gossip of the beaches and what news there was of the outer world, which last was poor and insufficient, though I did not think so at the time. Everything was new and strange to me—and a little wonderful, perhaps. At Adele I had come to think of civilization as something meaning the sale of copra, the production of trade-goods, rations and books, and a place from which story manuscripts were regretfully returned,

but otherwise amorphous and intangible. Here at Daru I was faced by the thing itself in concrete. Here, with more or less frequence and regularity, came mails and newspapers ; and most of the men wore white starched suits, with trousers stiffly creased ; and one lit his house with acetylene gas ; and one had a piano, and another that most astonishing of things—a billiard table ! And one of the seventeen was a woman.

She was the Missionary's wife, a dear old lady who made much of me, and mothered me, and gave me tea in dainty china cups at her beautiful home, which was manned by trained servants and delightful with the touches that only a woman can give, and which made my house at Adele seem distastefully crude, and a cook who dried dishes on his loin-cloth a most impossible person, however faithful.

Like other missionaries' wives I have met and come to know, she had endured much privation, danger and sickness in her devoted accompanying of her husband to strange and little-known places, traversing incredible distances in native canoes and small, inadequate sailing craft, tramping endless beaches, living in villages where risk of attack by natives was always present, eating foods on which no white woman should ever be called upon to live—and enduring it all with a heart-whole courage that many a strong man might envy. I am no upholder

of missions, and my beliefs are the beliefs of Huxley and Herbert Spencer ; but I raise my hat to the splendid steadfastness of such women as she.

On a small eminence back a little from the beach was the Magistrate's residence—a fine, roomy bungalow hedged by flowering shrubs and flamboyant trees—and the gaol, from which filed each morning, under a native guard, men in white broad-arrowed loin-cloths to labour at the draining of a swamp and the making of a road. Some came from far to the eastward, and were bronze-skinned, fuzzy-haired, neat of build and round of face ; some, swamp-dwellers from the flat-lands of the western coast, were tall, lean, and black of skin, with asymmetrical heads, and arms ape-like in their length ; others were slight-statured, curly-haired villagers from far up the uncharted reaches of one of the innumerable rivers. Their variety of type was illustrative of the diversity of races by which New Guinea was tenanted.

I pitied these poor creatures who, to their way of thinking at least, had done no wrong save disobeying the edicts of a superimposed civilization ; in their general lack-lustre of eye and a certain heaviness of walk I seemed to detect the pitiful hopelessness of wild things that had lost their most valued possession —their liberty. But the Magistrate held otherwise.

" No doubt they feel the restraint a bit at first," he

said. "But it soon wears off in most cases. Gaol, you see, has its advantages. In his village a man may be living in deadly fear of attack by other tribes or individuals and with nothing to protect him but watchfulness and skill at arms. In gaol he is perfectly safe. Safety is a very big thing away there on the mainland, where live some of the fiercest tribes in the country. Then, too, prisoners get regular and abundant food and tobacco, and a good, dry sleeping place; and the hours of labour are not so many as are in force on coconut and rubber plantations. Gaol! Do you know, I've had difficulty in getting prisoners to go away when their sentences were served! They had come to regard the gaol as their secure and comfortable home. Besides, a man who has been convicted of adultery is often chary of returning to his village, for fear the lady's husband may consider he has not been sufficiently punished and square matters with a stealthy club."

The stealing of other men's wives was the commonest serious offence, he explained. Murder came next; but the death penalty was seldom, if ever, imposed, for the Government, recognizing the difficulty of getting behind the native mind and thereby arriving at true motives, knew that what to white-man understanding seemed undoubted murder might not be murder at all, but justifiable homicide. Consideration of the native point of view was essential to

just administration; the Motor-car Age, arbitrarily judging the Stone Age, was liable to breed misunderstanding, discontent and consequent trouble.

Cannibalism was punishable with the longest term of imprisonment of all. Several of the Daru prisoners were serving sentences for this offence. I was shown a particularly choice specimen—a middle-aged man, tall and strongly built, with rather pleasing features, twinkling eyes and a ready smile about his mouth. He looked a good-natured, kindly sort. . . . He was doing " Life " for having eaten his mother. . . .

In the course of his journeyings about the primeval land he governed the Magistrate had garnered many strange and interesting curios. The walls of his house were hung with " exhibits " from cases he had tried; man-killing arrows definitely different in haft and barb from those used for hunting; cane-strung bows so strong that no one unskilled in their use could draw them to their full extent; stone clubs and wooden clubs; thrusting-spears and throwing-spears. He had also headdresses built up of feathers of innumerable birds-of-paradise; grotesquely painted dancing masks; a smoke-dried human hand, severed at the wrist, which had once hung suspended on the breast of a chief; and other things illustrative of primordial man's love of ornament and decoration.

He was a typical example of the best type of British

administrative officialdom in the wilder of the South Sea Islands. He did things without unnecessary ceremony or formality. My arrival at Daru coincided with his return from a two-weeks' pursuit of a trio of native murderers on the mainland. He looked the veriest ragamuffin. His clothing was so torn by jungle-vines as barely to hold together, his boots were in a most disreputable condition, there was a fortnight's growth on his chin, and he was long past due for a haircut. But he had secured his men, and nothing else mattered.

This carelessness of appearance was once the cause of him being for a time the most embarrassed individual in the whole of the South Seas. It being considered desirable that a spot on the coast should be marked as the point of commencement of the dividing-line between British and Dutch New Guinea, the two governments agreed to send representatives and formally declare the boundary. Daru being the nearest British post to the Dutch possession, the Magistrate was instructed to represent Britain in the matter. Dressed in his usual costume of trousers cut off at the knees, a cotton singlet and slouch hat, he set out in the only vessel available—a dirty, little, cockroach-inhabited sailing-cutter, manned by a half-dozen natives. Bad weather delayed him, and when he reached the meeting-place the Dutch were already there.

They were there to some purpose. A snow-white sloop of war, with flags flying, lay at anchor. A shining gunboat rolled easily to the light swell. On the beach stood a large marquee and numerous smaller tents. Bands were playing and Chinese and Malayan soldiers drilled and manœuvred. White-clad Europeans moved about. The Magistrate rubbed his eyes. It was a most incongruous scene for the wilds of Western New Guinea. Then, as his disreputable craft lowered her tanned and dirty sail and came to anchor near the sloop, he remembered that Dutchmen were notorious for fondness of pomp and display.

He had difficulty in convincing the spotlessly clad officer whom, with a guard of soldiers, met him on the beach, that he was the accredited representative of British might and majesty ; and it was only after careful scrutiny of credentials and a welter of questions that he was at last accepted. The Dutch apologized profoundly for their mistake and fêted him and did their best to make him feel at ease ; but the Magistrate was not wholly relieved of his embarrassment till, the marking of the spot completed, he was again aboard his cutter and fairly on the way back to Daru.

There were other interesting characters in that little community. One had been at various times and in divers places, insurance agent, bricklayers' labourer, sailor, bookmaker, actor, and gold-miner ; and though now a trader in a fair way of business the tale of his

variety of occupation was not complete, for later I met him running a labour-recruiting schooner in the Solomons, and, still later, as owner and manager of a Sydney hotel, where at length he died.

Another was credited with coming to the Islands as a missionary and stepping down from that high place by the steep ladder of rum and native women. Still another was a half-fledged doctor to whom the Call of the Open had been stronger than desire for the confinement of sick-rooms and hospitals and surgeries.

And there was Portugee Sammy, who ran a little store for natives. He was a small, wizened man, with bright, good-humoured eyes and a trick of bulging his cheeks when he laughed ; and he wasn't a Portuguese, but a half-caste Frenchman born in Tahiti. He had a Papuan wife, about forty years old, flat of breast and stooped and wrinkled, aged in mid-life as was common to her short-lived race. He had, also, a sixteen-year-old daughter, with a finely modelled face, black, passionate eyes, and a figure as pleasing as those of her parents were ugly. It was Sammy's obsession to marry her to a white man.

" But proper married, b'fore Miss'onary or Mag'-strate, with ring an' paper," he warned in the clipped speech of the half-white. " No' married native-fashion—like me and her mother."

And his obsession ended in tragedy, for realizing

the limitations of Daru he sold his little store and took his daughter to one of the settlements where Europeans were comparatively numerous, and where, a year later, I saw her walking the beach road, extravagantly dressed and flaunting her passionate beauty in the faces of likely temporary purchasers. Portugee Sammy died of a broken heart, the girl disappeared off the end of the jetty one moonless night, and all that remained was a flat-breasted, old-young Papuan woman who spent her lonely hours in soft wailing.

CHAPTER 7

The Fly River

NO other craft being available I left Daru for the Fly in a cutter captained and manned by local natives. It is not good to travel in such a craft if one is in a hurry. These natives had but little idea of going ahead with a job and getting it done. Heedless of the fact that the sooner they completed their contract to take me to the river and bring me back the sooner would they be paid, they dawdled their way along, missing winds and tides with great persistence in favour of stopping at almost every village, to the spending of long hours ogling girls beneath the palms, and gossiping and smoking and chewing betelnut with all and sundry.

But such slow progress was all part of the day's work in a land where time was neither object nor hindrance and "Presently!" the word oftenest on the lips of its people; and such is the power of environment and example that even I, offspring of industrious modernity, saw but little sophistry in the Philosophy of Indolence as expounded by the captain in his own euphonious tongue:

"Why hasten when there is no need? Time is wide like the sea. The boars'-tusks, arm-shells and dogs'-teeth will be there even a year hence. To

hasten when there is no need is foolish. And foolishness brings trouble."

We reached the mouth of the Fly at a dawn such as makes a healthy man want to thank God for being alive. Almost every Western New Guinea day is a wet day. It has been said by various ironical parties that the climate of those regions consists of nine months rain and three months wet-season. It has been declared, further, that those responsible for recording the weather's behaviour do not measure the rainfall in inches, but heave a lead-line into the gauge. But this morning it was as though wind and sky had conspired to expose for once the full beauty and grandeur, and a little of the awe, of this place where the greatest river in all the islands ended its known navigable length of more than four hundred miles in an estuary a full day's sail across.

The sky was blue and cloudless as only a tropical sky knows how to be, and the night-wind being done and the day-wind not yet come, the wide half-circle of the sea lay smooth and still, clear to the clean, sharp line which was the horizon. It was a French-grey sea, exquisite of tint ; and in its broad stillness was a sense of waiting. This sense of waiting was omnipresent ; the land, illimitable and flat, with not even the makings of a hill nor a tree higher than its mates, seemed hushed and silent ; the cutter lay motionless to the dead tide. The only sound was

that of the philosophical captain softly chanting a fragment of some village dance-tune.

Then the blue of the eastern sky gave place to a flushing pink, which presently was scored by a thousand flaming fingers ; and when the sun's upper limb peered up like an inquisitive eye they came slowly down and lay clean-edged upon the water like ribs of a giant fan ; and the once grey sea became alive with the hues of iridescence ; and the flat land lost its dull greenness and sparkled with colours and highlights ; and the fancy came to me that it was all a play, a gorgeous extravaganza in which the coloured land and broad display of the sunrise were wonderfully painted backcloths and the deck on which I stood the floor of the stage. And the captain ceased his chanting and, staring, pointed far across the flat lands to what at first seeming were outlines of forming clouds, and whispered that there was the dreaded dwelling-place of the spirits of those whose bodies had been eaten on the coast, the haunts of men with tails and women with prehensile teeth, the place of many strange and awesome creatures—the Snow Mountains of Dutch New Guinea.

Finding a navigable passage through the sand- and mud-banks of the bar was no easy task. The chart did not give much help. It showed the estuary as a medley of shoals and shallows marked mostly " E.D."—Existence Doubtful—and, what was worse,

"P.D."—Position Doubtful. It was a disconcertingly indefinite chart; which was quite understandable in view of the fact that rushing tides and frequent floods continually altered the heaping of the sands and in a month or less were liable to convert a broad, deep-water channel into a treacherous shoal. And there were no guiding and distinguishing tints of blue and green; the descending fresh water covered depths and shallows alike as with a yellow blanket.

We trusted neither to sight nor chart. We took off most of the sail and felt our way in. It was not like ordinary navigation. It was like a blind man tapping for the curb. One of the crew stood forward of the mast and felt for the bottom with a pole. If he didn't find it, all was well and we kept the straightness of our course; if he did find it, he waved a quick direction to the steersman and we zig-zagged about till we came to deep water again. And sometimes the steersman wasn't quick enough, or the particular bank we were trying to avoid had an unsuspected steepness, and we stuck. Whereupon all hands sat down and had a smoke and waited for the tide on which we were entering to float us off, and the captain philosophically remarked that a little sand and mud in the seams of the cutter's bottom might do something towards stopping a leak that had been bothering him for months. And sometimes we met curious little

head-currents that swept us back on our tracks a bit, and currents that travelled in circles and did their utmost to take us sideways out of the channel, and currents that ran just beneath the surface and gave surprising changes to our course. It was as though the river objected to our entering.

And in journeying up the stream we did not make very rapid progress either. Here too were hidden shoals, and though not so numerous as on the bar, we frequently found them with our keel. Once the ebbing tide left us high and dry all through a night—a night in which mosquitoes, sandflies, the bad smell of mangrove mud, and the uncomfortableness of an acutely sloped deck were the chief distressing phenomena. Then too, despite that the trade wind was a following wind and of sufficient power to keep our sails swelled full, we could progress only with the tides —which meant that fully half our time was spent at anchor.

We seldom anchored out in the stream. The captain and crew with considerable ingenuity so timed the sailing as to be near a village when the tide made its adverse turn. Their gregarious instinct was highly developed.

The villages of the Fly were not at all like those of Adele and places further to the eastward. They had no rows of buildings or streets. They were villages of one house, or at most two. Many stood on land

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that was covered at high tides, for dry earth was scarce in that dead flatness, and were high-fronted and built on tall stilts. They were of extraordinary length ; several I measured were more than two hundred yards from front door to back steps. The interiors were divided into sections which in turn were divided into cubicles. They were not unlike the Dubus of the Gulf, and were the most really communal dwellings I had seen.

The majority of the up-river people were slightly built, ungainly of limb and thin of face, with long, dolichocephalic heads and high, projecting shoulder-blades ; and they had the curious, flat-soled, round-kneed gait that comes to dwellers in swamp-lands. Save for an occasional loin-cloth the men wore only a piece of string ; the women's dress was the usual grass petticoat, but much shorter and skimpier than that of other tribes. I think they were an unhappy people ; certainly there was about them a general air of furtiveness and fear—due perhaps to the fact that they were over-given to inter-tribal quarrelling and lived mostly in a state of war.

For a week or more I journeyed about the head of the estuary, calling at each and every village in my seeking to exchange the products of modern civilization for the products of barbarity. I sailed tributary streams which rivalled the river proper in width and depth. I crept along creeks so narrow that the

vegetation of the banks met in an overhead arch which shut out the sun. I wriggled to the heads of ana-branches scarcely wider than the cutter's beam. There were sago-palms everywhere, and mangrove-trees with hooped surface-roots showing like nightmares of arching snakes. Crocodiles were numerous ; at low tides they dotted the sandbanks like logs brought down in a flood. A noted liar of my acquaintance, captain of a small steamer which occasionally visited the Fly, used to declare that whenever he stuck on one of the numerous shoals all he did was blow the whistle hard ; whereupon the sunning crocodiles immediately dived and so raised the water that the vessel floated off.

At one place I anchored the cutter and, accompanied by three local men, journeyed to some of the inland villages, partly by canoe, partly by floundering through knee-deep slime and mud, partly by stepping from one hooped root to another through a mangrove swamp. I know of no more distressing and heart-breaking travel than through a mangrove swamp. The natives curved their toes about the roots and stepped from one to another with amazing facility ; but my boots slipped and slid to such extent that I had to pause after each step and make sure of a hand-hold before attempting another. All about were projecting knobs and spikes which tore skin and clothes ; and often a root gave way beneath my weight and dropped me

waist-deep in slush. And all the while the denseness of the foliage made of the swamp a place of shadows, a place of brooding mystery, in which there was no life save that of loathsome-looking creatures which seemed partly reptile and partly fish, and which floundered away at our approach. There were two miles of that swamp ; to me they seemed twenty.

I obtained very few of the things I sought. There was a strange scarcity of bone and shell ornaments in the land. The stories I had heard of their quantities were greatly exaggerated. But it was true enough that the people were chronically short of white-man trade, particularly tobacco.

It was irritatingly true. For while they had nothing to sell or barter they did not hesitate to beg. They had raised begging to a fine art. They begged persistently and at all times and places. They told me stories of being without tobacco for periods ranging from a week to a year. They told me of some of their old folk who were liable to die forthwith unless they were provided with a smoke ; they thought any lie good enough that was likely to touch my heart. At every village I was greeted by numerous extended black hands, and in the river canoes would wait till we came up and then lie alongside while the most accomplished beggar on board climbed to the deck and beseeched presents ranging from a fish-hook to a camphor-wood box.

And my crew encouraged them. They told all and sundry that I had large quantities of desirable goods on board—much more than I could possibly need for my personal use—and said I was a fine, good-hearted man, generous in the extreme. Perhaps they hoped for a share of the profits. I don't know. All I know is that had I stayed up there much longer I would have been wheedled out of everything I possessed. After a fortnight of it, I turned the cutter's nose and headed down-stream for the island of Kiwai where, it was alleged, there was abundant native trade.

I was nearly not reaching there. The river made a final protest against my traversing of it. One early morning when we were anchored near the mouth of a small creek I awoke to a feeling that all was not well. It seemed the vessel had rolled a little, which certainly she shouldn't have done within the confines of a river so far from the sea.

I went hurriedly on deck. The night was clear and cloudless, with a half-moon lifting above the vegetation of the eastern shore and giving a silvery sheen to the water and soft definition to the palms about the mouth of the creek. There was something strange about the appearance of the water. About its still surface was suggestion of a paradoxical unrest. It was queer. It was uncanny.

Presently there came a long, low swell, light and distinct, like a slow pulse. The cutter swayed to its

passing. The anchor-chain rattled as in warning. A wave in the making washed up on the shore ; in the stillness I heard its swish and tinkle on the sand, and its receding chuckle. The air became tinged with a scent as of the sea.

Then from far down stream came a rumbling crashing, rapidly growing in intensity, like that of a fast-approaching railway train. It awoke the natives.

" The flood that comes up-stream ! " shouted the captain as they came on deck and sprang for the anchor-chain—and I knew then that a " bore " was coming—one of the devastating sudden risings of the river caused by the wind forcing the sea into the wide, funnel-mouthed estuary when the stream was already filled with a spring tide and fresh-water coming down.

I had heard of the fury of a " bore," and knew that to be caught in the main stream meant swamping for sure. But I needn't have worried. The natives knew what to do. They lost no time. The captain gave his orders with directness and precision. The others flew to obey. There was no indolence about them now. The anchor was raised with surprising quickness and the vessel poled into the creek and anchored in the shelter of the low bank.

We were just in time. Three minutes later the level of the creek rose with a suddenness that made the cutter so jerk at her anchor that I feared for the staunchness of the chain ; and a wall of water stretch-

ing right across the river to the height of a man swept up with a deafening roaring. It maintained its shape by its tremendous momentum. It was a breaker ever threatening to break, but just failing.

There was a peculiar fierceness about this flood, which travelled the wrong way to other floods. It was as though the sea had come on a punitive traversing of the land. The vegetation of the shore ripped and tore before it. Nipa- and sago-palms and mangroves struggled a moment with the water snatching at their branches and were carried away ; and the noise of their going was lost in the noise of the waters. Banana-palms, their broad leaves beaten to shreds, charged along. Coconut-trees, whose long fronds trailed like dead feathers, went by in a welter of confusion. Loose fronds and branches tumbled about in chaotic jostling. Logs and massed debris swung sharply into the creek and struck at the cutter's side. A canoe which evidently had been carelessly left in the stream at some village showed a moment. It was bottom-up, and there was a glimpse of something which the crew-boys declared above the noise to be the body of a man. Perhaps, opined one, he had been caught in trying to save the craft.

And then the water began to subside and its roar to fade ; the " bore " vanished as quickly as it had come ; and presently we poled out into the slowly stilling river, and I looked at the wrecked vegetation

of the banks with a feeling of thankfulness that shelter had been so near, and the natives beat their foreheads with their open palms and said one to another that an offended sorcerer was responsible.

The island of Kiwai, narrow, fifty miles in length and lying fairly in the centre of the estuary, was the home of the strangest of all New Guinea's tribes. They were big people, immensely muscular and broad of chest, and their skins were black with a blackness all its own—a dead, dull blackness which one does not associate with living tissue. They regarded close-cropped, artificially reddened hair as fashionable and beautifying, though the redness was that of pale carrots and was produced by the frequent application of lime made from the burning of coral, which sounds like a hair-destroying agent. Certainly it made a contrast to the blackness of their skins—a relieving note delightfully incongruous. And they had drooped noses and distinctly Semitic cast of features. It has been said that certain of their customs and ceremonies are those exclusively practised by Jews, and there are those who profess to a knowledge of such matters who suggest that they are the result of long-forgotten migrations from the great lands away to the north and east, and are remnants of one or more of the Lost Tribes of Israel. Their common designation, sometimes ribald, sometimes serious, is " The Black Jews of Papua."

Certainly they were sharp traders. Though in their houses were considerable quantities of the articles of native trade I sought, they pretended to being not at all anxious to sell them. For a long time they declined to discuss parting with them at all. When I insisted on talking about them, they pointed out that it took a man many weary weeks to translate a rough toyia shell as found on the reef into a smooth armlet of glittering white. The cleaning, boring and threading of dogs'-teeth was a whole-time job, they said ; and they added that the polishing and shaping of boars'-tusks called for a great deal of time and patience.

And the things were everlasting besides, they said. Why should they exchange them for white man trade which lasted but a little while ? Tobacco soon went up in smoke and was no more ; hand-mirrors soon became broken ; printed calico lost its colours and quickly wore out, and was much desired only by women, anyway. It was the same with the other things I offered to exchange for their enduring ornaments. Obviously it would be foolish to give away such good things for such rubbish, they said ; and glancing cursorily at my stock they turned the conversation on to the weather and its effect on the yam crops.

Obviously, too, they were surprised when, copying their tactics, I heartily agreed, and announced my intention of journeying to some other of the rivers,

where the people were less intelligent in this matter of the true values of white man trade-goods. They were disconcerted. Other white men in search of native trade did not behave in this manner ; they discussed values and bargained and offered gradually increasing prices. I was not playing the game.

And my strategy was effective, for, after consultation amongst themselves, they declared it would be discourteous and inhospitable to allow me to go away empty-handed, seeing I had come so far ; and presently they were pressing the things upon me, accepting my prices without question, so that in a very short while I had secured all I required.

CHAPTER 8

The Sloping Road

SOME months after my return to Adele the natives brought me news of a discovery of alluvial gold in the mountains to the eastward. The news had been passed from village to village along a hundred miles of beach and had so gathered exaggerations and additions by the way in true native fashion that it appeared the "money stones" were (1) the size of coconuts; (2) numerous as trees in a jungle; (3) heaped high as a house by the white men who had found them; and (4) were being carried to the coast by a continuous stream of porters.

Some time previously I had heard that two prospectors were in the part of the interior mentioned and by means of questions cunningly put and the careful sifting of replies I concluded there was a shred or two of fact in the report, and decided to try my luck as a gold-seeker. For by this time, native trade notwithstanding, I knew I was not destined to become a copra-king. My dream of a string of stations along the beaches had with complete thoroughness failed to materialize, and the future held no promise of its achievement. I was faced by the fact that trading at Adele meant nothing more than a precarious livelihood. It was an uncomfortable fact. I asked more of life than a precarious livelihood.

So I obtained a supply of mining implements by the store-ship, arranged with the book-worm trader for the care of my house and effects, and one dawn set off along the beach on the first part of the journey to the land of the "money stones."

I intended, whether or no I proved a fortunate miner, to give up trading. But I did not tell the Adele natives so. I lied to them. I said I was going for a little while and would surely return. I said that Adele was my home and its people my people.

For my going was occasion for a display of that deep affection for unrelated persons which I sometimes think only savages possess. They bewailed my departure as they would have bewailed the departure of the best-loved member of their tribe. They were tremendously distressed. The men smeared their bodies with the clay and ashes of mourning ; the women cut their foreheads with shells and mingled their blood with their tears. They subduedly chanted sorrow-songs and beat sobbing notes from drums. Grouped on the sand before the house, they watched my packing with eyes heavy with mournfulness. And as I crossed the river and started along the beach they sent the island farewell across the still water in soft, clear cadence :

" E-o. Ee-o. Ee-oo. E. E--oo. E--E--E--O--O. O."

It was sadness epitomized in vowel-sounds. What could I do but lie?

From Adele to the mouth of the river, which was the jumping-off-place for the interior, was 120 miles. I calculated to do it in six days. Ten miles before lunch and ten after seemed a comfortable day's walk. I was soon to discover I had miscalculated and that beach travelling had characteristics all its own.

Tramping hour after hour, day after day, on a surface everlastingly sloped the one way was not so much tramping as limping and gave to the miles inordinate length. And even the limping was not in a straight line; the search for hard sand and the avoidance of soft made for a tortuous course and materially increased the distance. Then there was nothing of the finality and objective of an ordinary road. There was never anything ahead on which to fix the eye, never a change of scene—only an endless succession of looping bays, each with a jutting point which held deceitful promise of presaging change of scene, and when reached was merely the beginning of another wide curve of sloping sand. I know of nothing more exasperating than those jutting points.

And there the curious circumstance that every now and then, particularly during the hotter part of the day, the beach seemed to roll and sway beneath the feet and for some distance ahead. Sometimes it rose like a breaking wave, poised a moment, and

subsided in a succession of quivering ripples. Sometimes it swung up with a suddenness which threw me almost off my feet. It produced a feeling as of sea-sickness. The first time it happened I thought of earthquakes, seaquakes and general disaster, and stopped dead. But to my astonishment my accompanying natives were quite unconcerned, and I had begun to think I was suffering from some new and subtle form of sunstroke before I understood.

The seeming movement was caused by continual one-sided sight of the everlasting heaving of the sea upsetting my visual equilibrium. Had the sea been ahead of me, or behind, the beach would have behaved itself and indulged in none of these unseemly imitations of the gymnastics of the waters.

But it was a beautiful beach. Its slopes and curves were deliciously round and soft. It had all the bright cleanness that only a wave-washed beach can have. Micaceous fragments gave to its grey-whiteness a twinkling as of stars. The breaking of every sea left it patterned as with lace. And all the while it was crossed by the green of convolvulus vines trailing to near the water's-edge as though seeking to drink, but hardly daring—a living, shining green bedecked by small blue flowers.

It was also an interesting beach. It was the dwelling-place of many strange and varied creatures. There were tiny crabs called " hermit " crabs which

commandeered certain spiral shells and made them their homes. There were round, flat, squashy-looking fungi which the natives, showing me alleged tracks in proof, declared had mobile powers. In many places were great flat areas of seaward sand which, when the tide was out, were the manœuvring grounds of millions of "soldier" crabs. They were tiny, red-backed creatures with white spidery legs; and they moved in divisions and battalions and regiments, with officers and advance guards complete, wheeling to the left, wheeling to the right, retreating and advancing and executing flanking movements with definite precision and conformity of rank. They seemed to be eternally rehearsing a battle—a battle that never came off. So many were the numbers of their marching hosts that the greyness of the sand was lost beneath the massed redness of their backs. Yet, walking amongst them, it was difficult to walk *on* them; as I advanced those in front scurried aside with amazing quickness and formed up behind, leaving their ranks unbroken. Theirs was the most perfect military formation ever known.

Once I reached a place where by some strange arrangement of the size and shape of its particles the sand made sounds as of music beneath my feet. They were sweet sounds, soft and resonant and of many blending tones. They were like the strains of a distant cathedral organ.

It was the place of the Singing Sands, said one of my natives ; and told a circumstantial legend concerning malevolent spirits doomed to eternal burial for their misdeeds who, hearing mortal footsteps above their heads, raised their voices in entreaty for release.

" They sing sweetly and put softness into their voices, so that we may think them good and be sorry for them and stop and dig them out," he explained. " Their sweetness is a lie. It is the fashion of bad spirits to lie."

I had no regular porters for the carrying of my goods, but employed the natives of one village to transport them to the next. Two sticks of trade tobacco—value twopence—was sufficient payment for a day's carrying of a forty-pound load. But I had to watch them, for the further eastward I went the nearer I approached civilization of a sort and consequent sophistication of the people. They were out to get something for nothing, or for very little. I always finished with more carriers than with which I started. They would distribute their loads. A man whose load consisted of a pick and shovel, prospecting-dish, small box of trade-goods, and rolled blanket and mosquito-net, was liable to arrive with only the pick, the other things being carried individually by men who had joined in the procession by the way. Often a man I had never seen before would

calmly claim the full rate for having carried a frying-pan or the lid of a billycan !

Often, pitying them, I gave the impostors a bit of the tobacco they hadn't earned ; but sometimes I rebuked them as swindlers and refused ; whereupon they made neither complaint nor fuss, but laughed and said admiringly one to another that I was not such a "fool white man" after all. They were inclined to regard generosity as inability to refuse and, therefore, a sign of weakness of character—which perhaps it was.

Every village in this region had its representative of white man government—a more or less influential native who wore the red-edged blue loin-cloth of Authority and, suspended on his bare chest, a small tin disc on which were cut the letters " V.C."—Village Constable.

They were valuable men to travellers, being always ready to assist in the matter of accommodation and the obtaining of carriers. Amongst their duties were those of seeing some degree of cleanliness was maintained in the village, of keeping order, and of arresting and transporting to the Magistrate of the district any serious offenders.

But their Place of Authority was no high one. The Government had no tremendous trust in this plan of teaching the people the civilized virtues by giving its imprimatur to certain of their number.

The V.C. had handcuffs, but the Magistrate held the key ; wherefore the Constable was compelled to take to his superior officer any villager he arrested, and make full and satisfying explanation. This prevented these proud wearers of the V.C. using the shackles as a means of blackmail or for purposes of private revenge, as they might be tempted to do.

For these services they received wages of £1 a year, their one-garment uniform, and a little tobacco now and then. One complained to me that it was not enough.

" When next I see the Magistrate I will ask him to find another man to be the Constable of this village," he said in Motuan—the trade language common to the beaches. " It will be easy to find one ; many men are eager to wear the blue loin-cloth and be as a chief. It is good to be a Village Constable. Very good. There is little work to do and the one pound and the tobacco are as presents. But I cannot be the Constable any longer. For my wife is dead and I want to take another, but her father asks many things in payment for her, and I have none of the many things, nor the money wherewith to buy them at the traders' stores. I want to leave and go to work on the plantations of the white man and earn the money. *For a man cannot buy a wife on wages of one pound a year.*"

In many of the villages were churches of the London

Missionary Society in charge of Samoan teachers, most of whom closely resembled in manner and appearance my old friend Ezekiel of the dress-loving wife, and were kindly, hospitable men who placed at my disposal the best of all they had and bade their wives kill the most succulent of their fowls for my repast and gave me the bedroom they kept in readiness for the infrequently visiting Missionary and other travelling whites, and asked nothing in return. All of which was a welcome change from the village houses in which I had been sleeping by the way—houses that reeked of oiled and perspiring bodies, of stale and decaying fish, of the fumes of rank tobacco smoked in spills of dried banana-leaf.

These men were worshippers of " Tamate " Chalmers, the " Livingstone of New Guinea," who was killed by the cannibals of Goarabari. His picture hung in the place of honour in their houses, and memories of him lived vividly within them. They greatly admired his personal courage and fearlessness. He was a Man who Did Things, they said.

Certainly there was nothing of the common or garden variety of psalm-singing parson about this great, good white man who had been the first to take missionary-explorer enterprise to the unknown Gulf of Papua. He was one intolerant of knee-drill when there was real work to be done ; supplication was all right when all else failed. As he used to say, he

believed in " doing his darndest first." In a letter I once saw, written to a friend, he said, speaking of the wreck of the mission vessel *Harrier* :

" Some of the papers are jeering. They draw ridiculous pictures of a shipload of missionaries praying for rescue. . . . Hey, mon ; but there was little time for praying, I wouldn't allow it. . . . It was all hands to the pumps. . . . We prayed *afterwards*. . . . Offering thanks for deliverance. . . ."

It was mainly this quality of forcefulness and trust in his own ability that made him the most beloved missionary in the whole of the Islands, that made Robert Louis Stevenson call him " The man I love," and the notorious South Seas buccaneer, Bully Hayes, remark admiringly : " He is a Man ! "—that made his savage murder more deeply mourned by a thousand native tribes than the death of a dozen kings.

The natives liked going to church. It appealed to that sense of the mysterious and superstitious which was their ancient birthright. To them Christianity was another mysticism in some respects better than their own, in others not so good. But their understanding of it was often confused. They were inclined to mistake the symbolic for the actual—which accounts for the belief that a solar or lunar

eclipse was caused by " Kerosene belong them people in Heaven go finish."

The chorused singing at the services made especial appeal. The people were susceptible to rhythm and tone, and the hymn-tunes were a change from the village dance-songs. Indeed, with delicious disregard for the meanings of the words, they often incorporated the one with the other, so that deeply devotional appeal was incongruously mixed with savage rejoicing for the death of an enemy.

But all Papuans were not so musically susceptible. To one of the settlements there came once a Salvation Army band, the captain of which gathered together the local natives, gave to each a small coin or other article, and bade them give the things to the player they considered made the best music, thinking thereby to stimulate their interest.

The service started. The cornet-player blew his sweetest, the flautist trilled his most delicious trills, the brass bass put forth all his resonance. They strove in vain. For at the end the natives rushed forward as one man and heaped their gifts at the feet of the artist who had banged the big drum !

Before I reached the end of that beach journey I came across a curious instance of matrimonial infelicity. The husband was a half-caste trader at whose place I stayed a night, and who apologized for the untidiness of his house by saying that his wife was away, and

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later, as though unable to keep from seeking sympathy any longer, confided that she had deserted him.

It was always the way with women, he complained in very good English. You never knew what they'd do next. They were most unreasonable. You'd think a native girl would only be too proud of having a white—or part-white—husband and the run of a trade-room and all that. You'd think she'd be satisfied for life.

Well, it wasn't so. Though they had been married only four months—married by a Missionary in a church and everything, like she was a white woman—she'd run away. Yes, run away. Gone back to the village of her people, east along the beach there. And all for nothing. At least not for very much. She said she was ashamed of him. She said that every time the store-boat came he got a lot of rum and got drunk, and stayed drunk, and it made the people talk about him and laugh at him behind his back and say it would have been better if she'd married a native instead of a man who all the time drank strong waters and was stupid like a pig that had overeaten. She said they were always saying things like that, and she was so ashamed that she walked with her head bowed and kept away from the village as much as possible. And then, after the last row they'd had about it she got into a flaming temper and tore up

the marriage paper, said she wasn't his wife any more, packed up her things and cleared out.

That was a fortnight ago, and though he had sent messages ordering her to return, she was still away ; but he reckoned she would soon tire of living in a village house, eating native food, and with no trade-room at which she could help herself.

" She'll be only too glad to come back," he said confidently as we retired. " Her shame will soon wear off." And he said it as though he devoutly hoped it would.

But in the morning he was not so sure. Being himself half native he knew the extent to which natives were susceptible to scorn. As I was leaving he made a request.

I would be passing through her village, perhaps staying there the night—would I mind looking her up and asking her to return ? Maybe she would listen to me, being a white man.

" Tell her I will not drink rum again—at least not much," he added. And I promised to do what I could.

I found her without any difficulty—a brown-eyed, lissom creature, handsome of face and with soft brown skin. The task was distinctly out of my line. But I did my best. I told her in language so simple that she could not fail to understand that it was her duty to return. I appealed to her sympathies. I

drew a harrowing picture of her husband eating out his heart in loneliness. I said he had sworn himself to total abstinence. I said he had sworn never to make her ashamed again.

And it was all of no use. Crossed-legged she sat on the mat-covered floor of her father's house and said not a word till I stopped. Then she said briefly and decisively that she would never return. Her marriage was finished. She had torn up the marriage paper.

I tackled her again. I was warming to the task. I began to take a personal interest in it. I felt that my powers of advocacy had been challenged. I delivered a stern homily on the wifely duties. I pointed out that there was the danger of her husband taking another woman. Surely she didn't want such a thing to happen, I said. And on her replying to the effect that she didn't care if it did, I gave up.

But she went back. I heard of it long after. She went back six months after my visit ; and the occasion of her return was a month-old, yellow-skinned child which she laid in her husband's arms with the beseeching request that he ask the Missionary for another marriage paper, and the explanation that the people of her village were casting scorn upon her as one who had a child and no husband.

Scorn had driven her away, and scorn had brought her back.

CHAPTER 9

Geological Chaos

I HAD indeed grievously miscalculated the time of the journey along the beach. Instead of six days it occupied fourteen ; and such a hearty dislike had I taken to that sloping, moving road that when I reached the river, which was my first objective, and canoed up its short length to the village of Bioto, from where the march inland was to begin, I cared not if never I saw sea-sand again.

Bioto was not on the river proper, but—probably for defensive purposes—had been built on the bank of a narrow, half-hidden tributary creek dense with indigenous vegetation and surrounded by swamps. It was the worst place in New Guinea for mosquitoes ; the worst in the whole South Seas maybe. They were in countless millions, savage, hungry millions which allowed not a moment's rest or peace. Even the natives, more-or-less immune, kept protecting smoke-fires burning continually in their houses. I had to eat my food under a net. I could not remain in any one position for more than a few moments. My arms were kept working like flails. At night I had to lie straightly in the centre of my bunk, for if any portion of my body touched the net the buzzing hordes immediately made a massed attack through the mesh. The Biblical sluggard

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would have had no need to search for ants at Bioto.

And in the midst of this unceasing torture lived a white man, a priest of the Mission de La Sacre Cœur —a gaunt, haggard man, with deep-sunk eyes, and skin that curious blend of bronze and yellow which comes to long dwellers in unhealthy tropics. All day long he flicked himself with a feather switch in the seeking of a little respite from the flying torment. Each of the rooms of his poor, thatched house was mosquito-netted. When conducting service in his little church, a native stood behind him and whisked his head and face continually. No services were ever conducted under greater difficulties. I have never known a man more tenacious of purpose than that brave priest.

The inland travelling was even slower than the beach travelling. The native tracks, with never a level yard, went always up or down a precipitous slope. Each day's march consisted of slipping and sliding down a preposterously steep hillside for several weary hours, resting a while at the bottom, and climbing the next precipice to camp—a total straight-line distance of maybe less than a mile.

For the interior was a disturbed world, an agitated world, a world of precipitous earth so violently jumbled that it looked a gigantic and impossible slag-heap. There was nothing of the patient brooding of the

coastal flatlands, of the beaches' soft-cut curves, of the broad sluggishness of the river-mouths. There was neither order nor straight lines. Peaks and knolls and spurs thrust up with irrelevance all their own. Razor-backed ridges, devoid of leading slopes, wound drunkenly about. Irregular-shaped valleys, profound of depth and span, yawned like excavations of some mad, cosmic navvy. It was a geological chaos, though a chaos strangely silent and wildly beautiful and clothed from the noblest peak to the most insignificant ravine in one great tangle of vagrant vegetation so mighty and so dense that in it my following natives were more like shadows than living men.

"The people of the Hills say that the big god-spirits when fighting used mountains as clubs," said one of five beach men who had contracted to accompany me in my gold-seeking—a sophisticated individual named Nokodo who, having been on other expeditions, knew something of the inland tongues and promised great usefulness as an interpreter. "They are a foolish and ignorant people. They are people of the jungle, and not like we men of the coast."

The hill tribes were certainly different in many respects. Their houses, often round-topped and conical like bees-hives, sat low to the ground, and were without verandahs or porches, and the thatching was of grass, instead of palm-leaves, and was of many thicknesses, the climate of those elevations being

surprisingly chill. The slab floors were freely punctured with holes through which the people spat their betelnut-reddened saliva—a primitive attempt at hygiene—and for some peculiar reason they sloped towards the centre, where cooking and warming fires continually burned. To one unused to it, this slope made sleeping uncomfortable and disturbing and full of possible surprise ; more than once when camping in such a house did I awaken to a smell of burning and to find I had wriggled down hill and that my blanket was afire.

The villages were usually much smaller than those of the coast and almost always occupied the crest of a ridge or spur which commanded a view of the adjacent country. As the tribes were at war with one another most of the time, constant watch was kept from tree-houses perched high up between main limbs like the nest of some giant bird. Every high wind rocked them and blew away bits of the grass thatch and threatened to destroy them utterly ; but somehow they always remained secure. In addition to these defensive precautions, many villages were surrounded by a stout palisading of wooden slabs placed upright in the ground and touching one another. I saw several that were more than fifteen feet in height. Entrance was obtained by a small hole through which only one person at a time could crawl, and as a warrior with a club was usually posted just inside, care and

discretion were necessary in making even a friendly call.

Though of lesser stature than the people of the coast, the hill tribes were beautifully proportioned. The men wore no clothing at all, and the women only an occasional strip of grass which was more revealing than concealing. Indeed, it was not meant for concealment at all, but was the distinguishing badge of widowhood, early pregnancy, and sometimes was merely an ornament. The young women and girls were exceptionally beautiful of figure, and they had a poise and grace of carriage to which their nudity gave subtle emphasis. They were the perfection of healthy femininity. And—perhaps because of the general nudity rather than despite it—sexual morality was of a very high order, promiscuity and adultery being so unknown that there were no punishments for them.

Another difference between them and the folk of the coast was that they cared but little for white man tobacco. They grew their own—a fine-flavoured kind of cigar-leaf which burnt with very little ash even when smoked in a European pipe. I tried it often and found it quite satisfactory. They cured it exceedingly well, the final part of the process being to make it into rolls and hang them from the rafters of the houses in the smoke of the everlasting fires. Apparently it was indigenous. Certainly it was mentioned

in their legends, which went back to the realms of mythology.

The thing they sought from the traveller from the coast was salt—common salt. The lack of salinity in the air of those elevations made them crave for salt as they craved for nothing else. Having heard of this I had brought a considerable quantity—four twenty-five pound tins, each with a lid which fitted tightly enough to keep out the damp, a very necessary precaution in a land where daily rain was as certain almost as the rising of the sun. With a teaspoonful of salt I obtained sufficient garden-foods to last my five retainers a day. Two spoonfuls bought a pig. With salt I made friends with chiefs and paid for the porterage of my goods. And in almost every instance it was eaten straight away. Without salt I could have made no progress at all. It was the only thing for which the natives would do any carrying. Those four tins were the most important items in my equipment.

The women and girls did most of the carrying ; the men were content to follow close behind with the spears and other weapons. Despite the difficulties of the precipitous tracks those women swung along with the goods piled on their heads, keeping them in position with one hand and leaving the other free to brush aside the jungle-vines and ariel roots that reached across the paths like snakes ; and all the while

laughing and chattering amongst themselves. They exhibited astonishing powers of endurance ; at the end of a steep pinch when I, superior male and all as I was, carrying nothing but rifle and revolver, would be at the point of exhaustion, my following ladies would be as fresh as when they started ; when the day's strenuous marching was done and they had received the salt which was their pay, and maybe some scraps of red calico as a present, they would cheerfully set out and repeat the whole journey back to their villages.

" I knew not women were so strong," said one of my beach men whose legs, accustomed to the flatness of the coast, so rebelled against the continual slopes that for nights he was unable to sleep for their stiffness. " Truly the strings of their legs (muscles) must be as wires." I think he was annoyed about it ; he did not relish that the despised hill folk—and women at that—should defeat him in physical prowess. It was damaging to his prestige as a Man of the Coast, and a very superior person.

Swift-flowing, steep-banked rivers were numerous, and the finding of crossings added many a circuitous mile. More than once the reaching of an opposite bank was a matter of a full day's tramping of the shores. But here and there we came to short cuts —suspension bridges of jungle-canes. I didn't like those bridges. They didn't look safe. They were

merely a pair of thick canes fastened to convenient trees on either bank, with the yard of space between decked after a fashion, and another cane stretched across as a handrail. The natives crossed sprightly enough, a dozen at a time in single file. I crept over. I got down on my hands and knees and crawled. The structure swayed terribly to my slightest movement. I looked at the straight drop, of a hundred feet maybe, to the rocky, rushing river below and wondered anxiously if the fastenings of the foundation canes were secure. I remembered that canes quickly rotted, also that natives were apt to be careless in the matter of tying knots. But the bridges were really quite safe and never had opportunity to get out of repair, as the annual floods regularly swept them away and necessitated the erection of new ones.

The route I followed took me right into the heart of the country. I passed through places where a mountain's thousands of feet of perpendicular earth so obscured the eastern sun that the villages lay in purple shadow half the day. I traversed roads that were merely the half-dry beaches of noisy, boiling rivers. I came to villages where the people exclaimed at the paleness of my skin and the straightness of my hair. I came to villages where the dead were placed on platforms in the rafters of the houses and the mourners stood beneath and smeared their ash-covered bodies with the dreadful drippings of putrefaction.

At one of these places an epidemic of dysentery, which somehow had filtered through from the coast, had caused so many deaths that every house contained a corpse so placed, and I was compelled to sleeping damply in a quick-made shelter of bushes and boughs, despite that a chief hospitably volunteered to make his residence fit for my occupation by temporarily removing from the rafters the dreadful bundle which was the body of his eldest son wrapped in banana leaves and laced about with jungle canes.

I came to villages where there was ominous absence of women and children and old folk, where the only people visible were fully-armed warriors who stood about in silent groups and regarded with sullen suspicion our efforts to persuade them of our friendliness and accepted much-desired salt and other presents only with profound mistrust—all of which made it highly advisable that in using the houses they reluctantly lent us we slept well away from the walls, through which spears could easily pass, and took it in turns to maintain an all-night guard.

As a means of indicating that they wished to have nothing to do with strangers, one tribe had carefully planted the steep track leading up to their village with spearheads so that the sharp points peeped just above the surface—a little matter which caused the hill-folk accompanying me to keep well to one side and brought from them exclamations of surprise that

I could walk straight on without damage to my feet, boots being new things to them. And when, taking no heed of this warning, we continued the ascent, there came suddenly from above a tremendous yelling and shouting, and about the top of the stockade appeared painted and be-feathered warriors who, clearly outlined against the sky, shook spears and clubs with extraordinary vehemence and screamed abuse and rolled stones down upon us, and slapped their naked thighs with their open palms, a favourite and decisive means of conveying insult.

But before I reached the entrance to the stockade the noise had ceased, and on breaking a way in I found the place deserted. Whereupon I paid off my hill carriers and followers, sent them back to their villages, and camped and waited to see what would happen. For an hour or more I remained in full and undisputed possession of the village ; then out of the long grass flanking the slope appeared two men.

They were old men, very thin and wrinkled and ugly, and one had a huge boar's tusk through his nose and the other his hair plastered down over his eyes ; and there was a pitiful tremulousness in their approach. I signed to them not to be afraid, gave them through Nokodo a message of my deep and everlasting friendliness and placed on the ground a little pile of salt and a tiny mirror. Then I stepped back and watched.

For a full ten minutes those two poor old chaps stood motionless, looking at me searchingly and at my five men of the coast. Then they whispered one to another and cautiously advanced, picked up some of the salt in their fingers, smelt it, tasted it, and eating it, retreated. The mirror they did not touch. I put some more salt for them and the performance was repeated. Then they went to a hole in the palisading and shouted to their friends ; and in a little while the village was filled with people, and presents of yams and sweet potatoes were being heaped upon me, and the head chief was making gestures which plainly meant he considered me a darn good fellow and that for another fistful of salt he would make a blood-brother of me. I learned then that the demonstration of hostility was due to the fact that they had mistaken my crowd of hill-folk for an invading army and decided upon attack as the better part of defence.

And in the midst of this far region, nine days' walk from the coast, my beach men rebelled. They had had enough of the perpetual climbing, they said, and of a climate unaccustomedly chill, and of jungles where one never saw the sun and which gave to midday the seeming of dusk. Also, they were getting too far from their homes. It was not a good thing for a few men of the coast to be away here amid all these strange and warlike tribes, they complained, and added that had they known the goldfield was so

far they would never have contracted to come. Would I please turn round at once?

I wouldn't, and said so with emphasis sharply pointed with rebuke for timidity and cowardice. They listened in sulky silence, and I thought I had quelled the budding revolt; but one night they took matters in their own hands and deserted, taking with them the whole of the supply of salt in order to purchase food on the journey. They returned—returned humble in spirit, glad to be under my protection again, scared almost white from their experiences, earnestly seeking forgiveness, and explaining that in trying to make the coast loaded with so much coveted salt and displaying an entire absence of firearms they had undertaken the most tremendously foolish risk of their lives.

But for the five days they were away I was utterly and thoroughly stranded, for without salt I could get my goods carried neither ahead to the goldfield nor back the way I had come; and I was beginning to think I would have to abandon the whole outfit and make my personal way as best I could, when a party of three white men, with twenty-five coastal carriers, arrived and put my mind at rest by offering to lend me salt should my deserters not return.

They were hunting birds-of-paradise, then a perfectly legitimate occupation, and for several days they camped at my village while they explored the surround-

ing country for plumes. Their method was to send their natives, armed with small-bore guns loaded with shot so fine that it would not damage the feathers and draw as little blood as possible, to the haunts of the birds, where they concealed themselves and shot the gorgeous creatures as they danced in the brightness of the early morning. Only the males were taken, the females being drab and commonplace. The birds had " dancing trees," which they regularly frequented. The villagers helped the shooters by snaring the birds in ingenious contrivances of their own manufacture, and by smearing the limbs of the " dancing trees " with a kind of birdlime made from jungle gum. Skinning and stuffing was done by the white men. Bloodstains were removed by dusting them with plaster-of-paris while still wet ; the plaster soaked up the blood and when dry was scraped off, leaving the feathers quite unstained.

At this elevation—five thousand feet—many varieties were represented. There were Ragianas, copper-red of back and with tail feathers delicate like foaming lace ; Magnificents—small delicately built birds with yellow-backed wings and tails extended in hoops like thin wire ; Superbs whose gleaming black wings sprayed in a pair of wonderful fans ; and Gorget Birds, and Empress Birds, and Blue Birds, and others with names suggestive of their great glory. Seeing them dancing in all their wondrous beauty I thought

their slaughter the foulest murder ; and no one was gladder than I when at length it was declared illegal.

The attempt, though, to stop the regular trade sent values soaring and gave a fillip to illicit plume-hunting. Though the penalties were heavy—confiscation of the birds, a £200 fine and maybe two years' imprisonment—there were always men ready to take risks for the high prices.

On a later journey I made to the interior, to the region of Mt. St. Mary's, I was camped with a prospector who was also a spare-time bird-hunter, when news arrived that a Government party was on his trail. Handicapped by his mining equipment, the prospector had no hope of out-distancing the light-travelling Government men ; so he decided to destroy the incriminating evidences of his nefarious side-line.

That night I saw two hundred of the rarest and most beautiful birds in the world go up in smoke !

CHAPTER 10

The Woman Stealers

AT a village called Kioti, six thousand feet above the sea and ten days' journey from it, where I camped a few days in order to investigate the auriferous promises of certain creeks and gullies, I had an experience which showed that pronounced hostility could be preferable to protestations of excessive friendliness.

The Kiotis did everything in their power to make me welcome. A pig was killed each day and presented with smiles and due ceremony, and each sundown women and girls came laden with more yams, sweet potatoes and other garden produce than my party could consume. The two best houses were placed at my disposal. The chiefs pressed on me certain small, triangular nuts which were the highest tokens of friendship and goodwill. They pressed them on me repeatedly. Dances were held in my honour, and at night the young men and young women sang songs extolling my virtues, while the old men squatted on the ground and throbbed out accompaniments on carved, wooden drums. When I set out on my daily journeys to the creeks, the chiefs insisted on sending a guard, taking no heed when I indicated the firearms carried by my boys and myself and declared I had no fear of attack. It was a guard of honour, they said,

an added declaration of the great and abiding joy that was theirs because a white man was honouring the village with his presence.

I suspected an ulterior motive in this elaborate expression of regard. That they were " up to something " I felt sure.

One morning I awakened to the voice of a man shouting loudly. In the stillness of the mountain dawn the words were sharp and distinct, the accented syllables of the inland tongue seeming to ripple in their flow. Arming myself, I ran out into the village street.

The man was standing on the platform of the tree-house, which stood at the highest point of the ridge. At the foot of the tree were men ornamented and prepared for war. Their bodies were daubed with yellow clay, great white circles were about their ears and eyes, and most wore headdresses of the long tail-feathers of birds-of-paradise arranged in the manner of a fan. Many carried short thrusting-spears generously carved and painted. Others were armed with stone clubs, some elaborately fashioned to the shape and design of a pineapple, some merely twelve-inch discs with a central hole to take the handle. Women and girls stood about the street, their big eyes turned towards the man on the platform.

" What does he say ? " I asked, as my coast-boys came running, each rifle in hand.

" It is a fight, master," Nokodo answered in the

trade-language of the beaches. "These people of Kioti are to fight those of Ufala in the valley below. It will be a big fight, and many men will surely die. He speaks, master, that the Ufalas will be sorry they ever stole women of Kioti."

The ridge commanded a clear outlook of the usual riot of peaks and spurs and knolls, some sedately clad in the everlasting green of jungle, others with their sides boldly naked, the red-brown volcanic rock ragged and scarred. At this early hour the day-wind had not come to stir the mist which filled the valley as with snow ; it lay still and even, seemingly soft to the touch, snuggling close to the very feet of the villages strung along the higher slopes. In the strengthening light the grey thatch of the houses grew slowly distinct against the background of green. It was the favourite hour for that calling from hill-top to hill-top, from ridge to ridge, which was the mountain tribes' commonest means of inter-village communication. The voice of the man on the platform carried over a distance of several hours' journey.

"He says bad things to the Ufalas," Nokodo went on. "Many bad things. It is the fashion of these bushmen to say bad things to those whom they go presently to fight. They fight first with their mouths. They make themselves brave by saying the bad things, so that afterwards they will fight strongly. Listen, master ! He shouts that the Ufalas are pigs who

eat entrails, and that each of their children has many fathers. Their warriors are weak like women, he says. Their hearts are as water. In battle they call on their women to help them. They weep like children when they are hurt. Never can they win a fight, even when they are ten against one. The Kiotis will drive off their warriors, burn their village, and take away women to replace those who were stolen. He speaks that way, master."

"So, it is about women that they go to fight?" I asked.

Nokodo nodded his fuzzy head.

"A month before we came the Ufalas stole two Kioti girls." He smiled contemptuously. "It is always about women that these bushmen fight."

I knew this woman-stealing for a phase in the operation of a natural law to prevent the evils of consanguinity. When the relationships of the people of a village reached a certain closeness, females were obtained from neighbouring communities. If the village were strong enough, it took them by force. If not, the women were purchased, payment being made in articles of daily use. Ufala, being a larger and more powerful village than Kioti, had adopted the former method.

"And he says the Kiotis are very strong," Nokodo translated further. "The warriors of this village have arms like other men's legs, he says, and their aim with

the spear is straight as a falling stone. No man of Ufala can stand before one of Kioti ; he would fall like a banana-tree when it is cut. He is foolish to speak that way, master. Very foolish. For the Kioti men are few and their village is small, while Ufala is large and has many warriors. The Kiotis will be easily beaten."

Presently a reply came to the shouted insults. It was faint and indistinct ; but not because of distance. Ufala, being at a lower level, was still below the mist, and it was as though the sound had to force its way up. A drum sounded, muffled and uncertain, and the wavering voice of a man, curiously blurred. Despite the blanketing of the mist, the tone of abusive challenge was plain. Obviously the Ufalas were not impressed by the warlike threats from above.

A number of Kioti men shouted back into the mist, and laughed derisively and thudded the ground with their clubs. Women and girls came running, and screamed and struck their naked sides with their elbows so curved as to produce a hollow sound. A youth with his body crossed by longitudinal yellow stripes beat fiercely on a narrow-waisted drum the height of himself.

And then it was I learned why these people had been so extravagantly friendly. An elderly man, powerfully built, with the filament between his nostrils so torn and distended that it formed a loop which

overhung his mouth, mounted the platform and shouted a speech so loud and fierce that it sounded above the din. I recognized him as the head-chief and one who had led the way in proffering me the hospitality of the village.

"Oh, they are a cunning people!" Nokodo exclaimed excitedly. "Master, master, do you know what he says? He tells the Ufalas that we will help Kioti to fight them!"

"What!"

"The guns of the white man and his natives will speak for Kioti," he says, "wherefore the Ufalas will be beaten. The white man is the friend of the Kiotis and will do as they ask. He tells them that, master."

So that was it! They had made themselves friendly in order to enlist the support of my firearms against the larger tribes! They would make a filibuster of me!

I decided to put a quick stop to that, and with my boys following went to the tree-house and ordered the people to cease their noise. For a time they took no heed, being too absorbed in telling the enemy the completeness of the disaster that would shortly overtake them; but presently they calmed sufficiently to make conversation possible.

The chief showed great perturbation when Nokodo, at my order, intimated that we would have nothing to do with the proposed tribal war. He spoke to

the others, who at once became silent, and crowded round.

Then he began an impassioned address to Nokodo, now and then holding out his hands appealingly to me. From time to time he spat angrily and shook a clenched fist in the direction of the invisible village. It seemed to me that the cries from below were not now so abusive and challenging; evidently the information that firearms would assist the Kioto spears and clubs was having a decided effect on the warriors of Ufala.

The chief begged that the white man would help them, came Nokodo's translation at the end. The Ufalas were a bad people. They were a very bad people, who spoke one way and acted another. For a long time they had pretended a great friendship for the Kiotis, visiting them often, and dancing and feasting and hunting with them, so that the Kiotis never thought of them as anything but their very good friends.

And then they stole two of their young women! The girls were working in the gardens down the slope, and the Ufala warriors crept on them silently and had them at their village before the men of Kioti could go to the rescue. Truly the Ufalas were a bad people. They were as snakes that lay in the grass. They deserved punishment. But Kioti was not strong enough, being only a small village and Ufala a large

one. It would be foolish to send so few warriors against so many.

But with the white man and his boys, each with a gun, it would be different. It would be very different. One gun was stronger than twenty spears. Clubs would be of no avail. The numbers of the Ufalas would be as nothing. Truly would they be punished for their woman-stealing.

A murmur went through the crowd when I shook my head ; and it increased when Nokodo translated my remarks to the effect that I had come here to look for "money-stones" ; not to help one village fight another ; and if they wanted to fight they must fight by themselves. The chief looked at me reproachfully and spoke again.

"He asks you to remember all the kind things the people of Kioti have done for you," said Nokodo. "The pigs, the many things from the gardens. Have not you and the chiefs eaten together of the *amana* nuts, he says, thereby making you as brothers ? Have not the women and girls made songs of your strength and of your kindness of heart ? Has not a guard gone with you when you wandered to the creeks ? A guard such as is given only to great chiefs ! A great friendship indeed have the people of Kioti made with the white man and his boys of the coast."

The warriors moved restlessly and spoke one to

another in whispers when I again shook my head. I detected about the manner in which they handled their weapons a certain enforced restraint. From the village below the mist there came now no sound at all.

For a moment the chief stood in listening attitude ; then he pointed down towards Ufala and spoke to Nokodo with great earnestness.

" Already has the news that a white man and guns are to help the Kiotis silenced the men of Ufala," came the translation. " They shout back no more. They are afraid. They know they will be beaten."

" No," I said. " I will not help."

" He bids you remember that friends help one another. Only do bad people like the Ufalas act first one way and then another. They were enemies who pretended to be friends. He asks if you are like them."

They took my final refusal in bad part. It was evident they thought me ungrateful, if not actually ill-disposed towards them. Some looked at me sulkily, resentfully ; some gathered in groups and spoke in low tones, evidently discussing the queer moral attitude of this stranger who would not assist his friends in time of need.

But it was soon plain they did not propose abandoning the expedition against Ufala. The warlike display and exchange of insults had worked them up. The

fever of battle was in their blood ; and suddenly the restraint I had noticed was cast aside.

The youth with the tall drum beat out a tattoo, and the shouting into the valley began again. The warriors brandished their weapons and pranced up and down the street. The lust of battle was in their eyes, and their faces were distorted by frenzy. The women began to dance to the throbbing of drums beaten by the old men—dance with a queer shaking of the hips and stamping of the feet, all in perfect time and unison. Their voices rose in a defiant chant, the falsetto notes high and clear.

And presently the warriors formed an irregular line and marched down the street. The women and old men stopped drumming and dancing a moment to call encouragement. The warriors halted and vented their war-cry—a full-throated bellow of defiance that brought echoes from the neighbouring hills. Five times they cried it ; then they filed through the hole in the palisading and disappeared into the jungle.

" These bushmen are fools," said Nokodo. " Their bodies are strong, but their heads are as the heads of children. The Ufalas will kill many of them. But they care not. They are mad for fight. It is their fashion. To-night there will be much wailing amongst the women of Kioti. I think, master, better we go to some other village."

I thought so, too. I would not be welcome at

Kioti any longer. The villagers might even make a hostile demonstration against me if I stayed, though, because of the firearms, it was unlikely they would actually attack. In any case the matter of obtaining food supplies would be difficult, which was a serious matter, as I relied mainly on village produce wherewith to feed my boys.

So, soon after the first of the sun began to tip the higher peaks with gold, my coast boys and some hill natives who had accompanied me to Kioti, strapped on their backs the canvas bags containing the equipment and stores, and we set out for another friendly village, arriving there late in the afternoon.

Because of the fact that the disturbed atmosphere of the daytime was unsuited to the transmission and receipt of hill-top messages, I had no tidings of the result of the Kioti attack that day. But early next morning voices cried across the mist-filled valleys and Nokodo came running.

"The Kiotis came back safely!" he exclaimed. "Not a man was killed, or even wounded! And they brought back two of the Ufala women they found in hiding—which makes up for the two that were stolen and makes Ufala and Kioti friends once more."

"Was there no fight, then?" I asked, wonderingly.

"No, master. When the Kiotis reached Ufala they found the village empty. There were only the

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old men and women hiding near by. That was all."

He laughed half-sneeringly, as though in expression of his acute consciousness of the superiority of his coastal birth and acquaintance with white men and the ways of civilization.

"Oh these bushmen! They make me laugh. They are great fools indeed! Master, master, do you know what happened? The warriors of Ufala thought we were with the Kiotis as they went down through the jungle. They thought our guns were there to bring death to them, and, Master—master—I laugh so much I can hardly speak—*they had run away!*"

CHAPTER II

The Gold Field

AND so, after many wearying days, I arrived at the goldfield—to find it had none of the characteristics of other new goldfields. There was no crowd of feverishly searching miners, no canvas town that had sprung up in a night, no welter of ragged holes and heaps of new-dug soil covering the earth as with wounds.

It was a quiet and lonely place. Its two discoverers were the only white men there. The camp was a single thatched hut standing in a space laboriously cleared of the fearful tangle of the jungle. The gold-bearing area was confined to the steep-sloped bed of a boulder-strewn river flowing noisily between high, precipitous banks.

For it was not auriferous country at all. The gold was " flood metal "—thin, irregular flakes which the river in its sinuous rushing to the sea had gathered one by one and deposited behind groups of boulders that happened to be in such position as to offer shelter of a sort from the wild swirling of the waters. It was a goldfield come by chance. It was also a " one-claim " field, there being, apparently, little gold outside the area marked off by the prospectors as their own. At all of which I was neither disappointed not surprised, for from natives by the way I had

long since learnt the true nature of the discovery, and had continued my journeying mainly because this inland travelling was an Adventure filled with the stimulus and interest of strange, new things.

The miners, each about forty years old, tall, lean, wiry, and with skin bronzed almost to the colour of a native's, were glad to see me. They were longing for new companionship, they said, for sight of a new face. Since the visit, three months before, of a Government official to report on the extent and quality of the find, they had seen no whites other than themselves ; and they had exhausted each other's conversation and ideas and were becoming irritable with one another without reason, as men do when isolated together for such long periods.

Wherefore they expressed themselves as delighted when I announced that, despite the unpromising outlook, I would mark off an area for myself and set to work. They invited me to camp with them and had their natives build me a bunk, and they opened a bottle of brandy they had been keeping religiously for use in sickness or accident, and listened greedily to what news I had of people and things of the outer world, and offered to show me the most promising place outside their claim and to help me all they could.

" But she's not an easy field to work," warned one.

" We've been on every field in New Guinea, but we've never struck one like this—have we, George?"

And George agreed that " she was the dead limit."

Certainly the field had difficulties all its own. There was, for instance, the little matter of constructing a sluice-box—a wooden structure shaped like a coffin, eight feet long, without top or ends. At any other field there might have been some possibility of obtaining planks for its manufacture. Here there was none. I was compelled to do as the two miners had done before me—engaging local natives to fell a tree of a certain soft species colloquially called " Candlewood," cut off a length of trunk and hollow it.

The process of hollowing afforded example of that enduring patience which seems a quality solely of primitive man. Those natives did it with " tomahawks " which were merely the blades of carpentering planes—at some places much-sought items of " trade " —lashed to rough handles of wood. Being intended for a gliding stroke and not a chopping one, a plane-iron made a most unsatisfactory " tomahawk." It made a stroke less than an inch in width. Its edge broke easily. It continually worked loose on the handle. But those natives didn't mind. They seemed to enjoy the task. Day after day they squatted about that log and chipped and gnawed and scratched, chattering and laughing all the while; and if at

night there was little to show for their day's work they were not at all disheartened, though they were not on daily wages, but had been promised a fixed amount of salt and red cloth for the completed job. The making of that box took two full weeks.

Then for the making of a dam, to turn a portion of the river's rush from the spot I intended to work, there was a remarkable scarcity of stones of a size convenient to handle, a circumstance which involved much strenuous struggling with half-ton boulders in swift, waist-deep water so cold that only with the greatest difficulty could I persuade the hill-men to enter it before midday, and the warmer-blooded coast men hardly at all.

Then when the dam was completed and the box set in such position that a narrow stream of water could be guided through it at will, there was the difficulty of digging the gold-bearing sand and rubble. It was not so much digging as scratching—blind, uncertain scratching at that. In water well above their knees the natives searched the bottom with long-handled shovels, scraping and feeling as best they could. As often as not the rushing of the water washed the shovels clean before they could be brought to the surface. At best only a few grains of rubble were won at a time. For long intervals the water had to be shut off from the box for the reason that there was no dirt to sluice. It was a heart-breaking business.

And work could not be continued after three in the afternoon. At that hour the daily rains came down and swelled the river to flood, and the box had to be taken to the shelter of the bank till next day. Often the flood seriously damaged the dam and necessitated further strenuous struggling with unwieldy boulders for its repairing.

Also, the constant splashing about in the water and wearing of wet clothes brought attacks of malarial fever which compelled me to stay in the hut and depute one of the coast-boys to supervise the work, with the result that little or no sluicing would be done, natives being disinclined to take orders from other natives.

It was hard, troublesome work, and the hill natives could not understand why we should do it. Gold to them was valueless, even from an ornamental point of view. A string of beads had infinitely more decorative value than a fistful of these grains, which to them were merely shining stones. They indicated quartz crystals and pieces of micaceous schist and declared them to have a superior shine to gold. Though at various times I went to great pains to explain the use of gold as a means of exchange, they failed completely to understand. I think they held the private opinion that it was sought because (1) it was believed to have properties connected with sorcery ; or (2) that white men were mad.

And the returns were pitifully small. Often the result of a hard day's sluicing was merely a few pennyweights, worth a few shillings. Some weeks I won barely enough to equal the value of the salt and trade-goods which were the natives' wages. Indeed, the natives had the best of it, for while they did receive something for their hard labourings, I received nothing at all, and in addition had to bear the heat and burden of the day.

I soon came to the conclusion that no fortune awaited me in mining, any more than one awaited me in trading. But I was not unduly distressed by the fact. I had merely taken a chance and lost. There were plenty of other chances to be taken, for the world was wide and I was young. The faith of youth in the future minimized the failure of the present.

So it was with a light enough heart that at last I bade good-bye to those two lonely miners and set out on the return to the coast.

I chose a route different to the one by which I had come, and it brought me to Mafulu, where was the furthest inland mission station in New Guinea. Mafulu was a little matter of a six-days' stroll from the coast, along a road constructed by the missionaries themselves—brave members of the Mission de La Sacre Cœur. Compared with a highway in civilization it wasn't much of a road; it was fearfully tortuous;

it was too narrow for wheeled traffic ; many of its grades had a steepness that even a free horse could not surmount. It was a road for pedestrians only, athletic pedestrians at that. But it was the only road of considerable length in the whole of New Guinea, and was something of a feat in engineering.

After the native tracks to which I had been accustomed, to traverse such a road was a pleasant relief. Well-built rest-houses dotted it at intervals of a day's march. Dilava, 3,800 feet above the sea, was a kind of half-way house. It stood on the edge of a shuddersome precipice amid a wealth of wildly beautiful scenery. From the edge of the precipice a horn was blown on Saturdays to intimate to the villages in the valley and round about that the following day was Sunday ; whereupon the natives intending to go to church collected their camping-gear and started off, arriving at the mission some time next morning. It was strenuous work being a Christian in those regions.

The buildings were the result of the missionaries' personal exertions. They sawed the timber with home-made, water-driven mills—the only imported parts being the saws—built churches, made roads, explored the country, and brought peace to many warring tribes—and did it all on no wages and, very often, on a starvation diet. They were a hardy, persevering lot, those members of the Mission of the Sacred Heart ; and my only grievance against them

is that in giving the women and girls dresses to cover their nudity in church, and taking them away when they came out, they exhibited appalling lack of a sense of humour.

One day my natives came running back along the track and intimated that someone was coming. I gathered from their expressions and manner they meant someone hostile ; all day long there had been shouting from one of the ridges. I slipped behind a tree and waited.

It was late in the afternoon, and the jungle-track wound shadowy and indistinct. I could not see clearly for more than fifty yards. Presently two forms appeared. In the gloom they were merely hazy shadows. I kept my rifle trained on them.

Then a woman's voice reached my astonished ears —the voice of a white woman ; and I stepped from my cover to meet two mission Nuns—two brave French ladies travelling from headquarters on the coast to a newly established branch station in the interior. Save for a rabble of half-savage natives carrying their goods they were alone. One was a girl in the twenties. For half an hour we sat on the roadside and talked in broken-French and broken-English ; and the memory will be always with me of their fine courageous eyes and the sweet resolve of their faces. They were the first white women to penetrate Interior New Guinea.

Another thing I shall always associate with that inland country is a sight I once saw from one of the higher peaks away to the eastward. I think it was one of the grandest sights in the world. The day I stood on that peak there was not a cloud in the sky ; the sun hung a mass of liquid fire in the midst of infinite blue. The knolls and spurs and ridges stood in sharp relief.

For a space of ten minutes I had a clear and uninterrupted view of far away—very far away—on either side the gleam of sparkling water. It was the Pacific Ocean. I was looking right across the greatest island in the world.

CHAPTER 12

"Thirsty" Island

AND then I changed the venue of my vagabonding. I was coming to know New Guinea too well. The urge for change was upon me. I was tired of the adventure I knew and wanted the adventure I didn't know. So, with the idea of becoming a pearler, I journeyed to Torres Strait, the area of coral- and island-strewn water which keeps New Guinea and Australia apart by a hundred miles, and came to Thursday Island, an eight hundred-acre speck of land which for its size must be the most cosmopolitan spot in the world.

In the little town bestraggling its beach and the slopes of its backbone of hills live Europeans, Japanese, Chinese, Malays, Manillamen, Kanakas, Chillians, Papuans, Samoans, Australian aborigines, and half-castes, quarter-castes and castes so hopelessly mixed as to be no caste at all. In its streets you will see a Singalese jeweller's, a European hotel, a Philippino's fancy-shop, and a Japanese merchant's next door to one another. In twelve men drinking at the bar of an hotel you may find eleven nationalities. A visiting ethnologist, it is alleged, calculated that all the peoples of the world were represented there—with seventeen over.

And variety of tongues is equalled by variety of

costumes. There are Japanese women in clattering sandals and flowered kimonas with back-bows so great that they look like old-time bustles ; barefooted Malays in loose-wound sarongs ; Kanakas in sleeveless shirts and dungaree trousers cut off at the knees ; Papuans in skimpy loin-cloths ; Europeans in white starched suits ; Australian Aborigines, pathetic in cast-off oddments, some in trousers only, some in shirts and nothing else.

It is a religiously important town, for it is the headquarters of a Church of England diocese which comprises the Gulf of Carpentaria, the Northern Territory of Australia, portion of the State of Queensland, and the whole of Torres Strait—an area greater than that of France and half a dozen minor European states combined. Its cathedral stands amid palm-trees and hibiscuses and croton bushes, and is a cathedral subtly expressive of the clear, soft beauty of the tropics, though no monument of skilful architecture in enduring stone, but a thing of simple wood without minarets or towering spire.

And it is a militarily important town, for the island stands fairly across this Strait, which is the gateway through which all ships seeking the shortest route between the Orient and Australia and the Indian and Pacific Oceans must pass. Wherefore the backbone of hills holds hidden guns, and the peculiar variety of the people's dress gains by the khaki of artillerymen.

And as the business centre of the pearling grounds it is an industrially important town ; and when the fleets are in there is much buying and selling of pearl shell and pearls and much drinking of potent liquors ranging from the over-proof rum of hard-bitten white men to the saki of Japan. Which accounts for its parodied name of "Thirsty" Island.

And being a place of all these importances it has a telegraph cable linking it with the outer world ; and a daily newspaper, remarkable as the smallest in the world, being merely a single sheet eight inches long by four inches wide and printed only on one side ; and a telephone service which in view of the tininess of the island seems a trifle superfluous ; and a town hall, used more for dancing and general entertainment than for the conducting of affairs of State, the people being naturally prone to relieve the tedium of their restricted island life with social pleasures ; and two banks, where pearlers leave their gems in safe keeping ; and on a beautiful point of the beach a fine, white-painted hospital, where the many, strange, and often loathsome diseases of India, Asia and the rest of the Orient, are treated by fresh-faced European nurses. There is also an open-air kinematograph show, of which the coloured population are such devoted patrons that when sudden tropic showers come drenching down they do not leave, but put up umbrellas and see the pictures through.

Some of these coloured people displayed astonishing ability to intelligently follow and understand the plots of screen-stories without being able to read a word of the explanatory lettering. I heard quite illiterate Torres Islanders describe perfectly the emotional sufferings of film-heroines without having been able to decipher even the ladies' names. I heard the most complicated screen-stories ably repeated by Papuans only a short remove from cannibalism, who asked the reason of the writing. To their minds it merely held up the action of the stories. Most, though, confessed to deriving their greatest pleasure from "one small feller man who got windward and leeward feet"—Charlie Chaplin.

Many of them took the pictures seriously and retained vivid memories of the players and their doings. A Kanaka pearl-diver told me he was very sorry for the working-class hero of a film he had just seen. In a previous picture, he said, the hero was a rich man, living in a splendid house, with many men to wait upon him, and surrounded by beautiful women. Now he was poor and had to work hard for his living and his house was small and he had only one woman, his wife. Had I any idea of the cause of all this misfortune?

But I came across one native who had no illusions. He was a raw Papuan from the region of the Fly River who had been brought to Thursday Island to

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work in the pearling boats, and who had never seen a "movie" till I took him along, thinking to give him a treat. For a time he watched the drama motionless with astonishment. Then a look of understanding came into his face and he leaned over and whispered hoarsely in his own tongue :

"Master, they make game of us. It is not real at all ! Oh, no ; it is not real ! They have practised it, even as we people practise our dances. Master, master, they but pretend."

In due course I obtained a lugger, a Malayan diver, a diving outfit and a crew of Torres Islanders. The lugger was a spry little vessel of some twelve tons register, clean-lined and stoutly built with a mainsail that was at first seeming too great a spread. There was about her appearance something gay and lighthearted. Her deck had the buoyant fore-and-aft sweep of all small craft worthy of the deeper sea. Her bowsprit tilted upwards as in joyous beckoning. Her masts were lengths of resilient pine, smooth as glass from the rubbing of the cane rings which held the sails, and the hue of copper from frequent greasings. I reckoned her a good sailer. So did my Islanders.

"She will walk up to windward quick and strong feller," said one, thus bestowing upon her the greatest compliment that can be bestowed upon a vessel whose motive power is wind. "I think the tides no can hold her back"—a patent exaggeration of her

sailing qualities, seeing that the tides of Torres ran like flooding rivers and could take the way off a full-powered steamer if so minded. It was the Islander's courtesy tribute to the thing of wood and canvas which for the next few months was to be his home.

They were well-set-up and muscular, these men of Torres, straight of limb and astonishingly broad of chest. They did not wear loin-cloths, but cotton singlets and trousers and sometimes hats, for they had been long in contact with whites and other foreigners and prided themselves on a knowledge of civilization and its ways, though it was a poor and unsatisfying knowledge and concerned as much with the vices of civilization as with its virtues. Their expressions were frank and pleasing, however, and in direct contrast to that of the Malayan diver.

I didn't like that Malay. He was an undersized, light-stepping person, with narrow, cunning eyes, a sullen cast of feature, and a forehead that sloped abruptly back like a snake's. His mouth, lipless at first glance, was a straight hard line. I suspected him of a penchant for knife-throwing and "running amok," and determined to watch him closely. Being accustomed to people who, if red, raw cannibals, were at least honest and sincere, I felt ill-at-ease with this shifty-looking member of a more advanced race.

I soon discovered that pearling was not nearly the romantic business it sounded. For one thing the

TURTLE ON DECK OF THE AUTHOR'S PEARLING LUGGER

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name was a misnomer. It wasn't pearling at all, but shelling. The obtaining of pearls was purely incidental. Only in about a thousand shells was there a gem of any value ; and even that one might be worth not more than £5. On the other hand, it might be worth £500. But the pearler who depended upon paying his way by discovering pearls would soon go bankrupt.

It was the shells that were sought—the bivalves, from eight inches to a foot across, which supplied mother-o'-pearl for knife-handles, buttons, and ornaments of a thousand kinds. There were several varieties, each graded into qualities, with values ranging from £100 to £400 a ton.

Then there was the fact that amongst the principal features of the business were personal discomfort and smell. A pearler had to endure weeks—months maybe—of bumping around in a tiny, heaving craft that was half the time a submarine ; to live mainly on preserved foods disturbing to digestion and unseductive to palate ; to occupy a preposterously inadequate cabin with a roof too low to allow him to stand upright ; to endure the everlasting smell of rotting shell-fish mingled with the acrid odour of stale bilge-water and that of the rank tobacco smoked by the crew—an abominable combination to which no white ever became quite accustomed.

But the life was exciting enough. The method of

deep-sea diving known as "drifting" was the one commonly in use in the Strait. With the first of the tide each day the diver dressed in his cumbersome suit and, with the crew-boys at the air-pump, descended to the sea-floor while the vessel sailed or drifted along above him. He stumbled along as best he could, half-running, crawling, jumping, swinging himself across chasms and other irregularities, having the vessel steered in the direction he wished by a series of signals—shakes and jerks—of his life-line. Whatever shells he found he placed in a net bag he carried which when full he took to the surface, handed it on deck, and descended again. When because of the proximity of reef or sandbank the vessel could drift no further, he came up and rested on deck while the lugger worked back to where another drift could be begun ; or perhaps he would not come on board at all, but would close his air escape valve till his canvas-and-rubber dress became inflated like a balloon and, half-submerged, allow himself to be towed along behind.

The excitement lay in the fact that there was always something liable to happen to the diver. There were "diamond fish," which were not so much fish as great circular masses of blubber ten or more feet across, that swimming with slow, easy strokes could sweep away his air-pipe and life-line by sheer momentum and weight. Nothing could bring a diver to the

surface quicker than the slow shadow which told there was one of these otherwise harmless creatures in the vicinity.

There was the risk of the air-pipe fouling a piece of coral or other rock as it lay along the bottom and breaking in response to the jerking of the lugger to the seas, thereby drowning the diver. As in his roamings of the sea-floor he might reach a distance from his vessel of several hundred feet, the diver was compelled to careful watching of his pipe, which was so swayed by currents and general motion of the water that its safe position might at any moment be changed to one of greatest danger. But all the careful watching in the world would not always prevent a fatal accident. In Thursday Island's cemetery lay several experienced divers who had lost their lives in this way.

There was the danger of sudden paralysis set up by the air-pressure. The pressure necessary to keep the dress inflated and thereby keep out the water was fifteen pounds for every thirty feet of depth. Thus at one hundred and twenty feet—an ordinary, everyday working depth in Torres Strait—there was in every square inch of the diver's body a pressure of sixty pounds—pressure sufficient to drive a steam-engine on full load. The paralysis was caused by tiny bubbles of air being forced through the skin into the blood stream. Bleeding at mouth and ears, deafness, headaches of a most serious kind, and partial loss of

vision were amongst the minor results of over- and too-long-continued pressure. Sometimes the man was brought up unconscious in the dress. Sometimes he was brought up dead. The surest means of preventing these results was for the diver to descend with exceeding slowness, thereby gradually accustoming his body to the pressure.

Octopi, terror of submarine workers in many parts of the world, were singularly scarce in Torres Strait. Indeed, many a diver had never seen one at all. But care was needed in the little matter of sharks. While the underwater appearance of a diver—enormously magnified, goggle-eyed and monstrous, with the air escaping from the outlet valve of his helmet like a continuous succession of gun-shots—was sufficient to make most sharks keep a respectful distance, there were always some ready to take a snap at him. Particularly was this so if the diver succumbed to the temptation to capture a crayfish or lobster ; the angry snapping of the creature's claws was liable to bring a shark which would make a dash for it—and take the diver's naked hand in passing.

Then there were the risks to the Islanders who, in the shallower water, up to ten fathoms, sought to augment the dress diver's efforts by " swim diving " at which they were extraordinarily expert ; wearing only goggles specially constructed to keep the water from their eyes, they slipped over the side, without

splutter or fuss, turned and *swam* down with all the surprising ease that comes of long practice and movements—plainly visible in the clear water—full of the poetry of graceful motion. They had none of the protection that the dress diver had against sharks, and many were the escapes I saw and heard of.

There was the astonishing case of Treacle, a " swim diver " employed by one of my colleagues. Treacle told me the story himself. With half a dozen other natives he was diving in eight fathoms when a sudden dark shadow of ominous shape appeared and there was a general rush for the surface and the boat. But, somehow, that shadow worked between Treacle and safety, and two fathoms from the top the man was using every trick of swimming he knew to out-swim the largest shark he had ever seen. Making upward all the while, he ducked and dodged and turned and twisted. He made all the noise and disturbance of the water that he could, in the hope of frightening the enemy. It was all no use ; six feet from the surface the shark made a quick dart forward, and Treacle found himself in a position in which surely no other man has been and escaped.

His head and neck and left shoulder were right inside the shark's capacious mouth !

Treacle told me he could feel the rows upon rows of serrated teeth crunching into his flesh. He said he could *see* some of them. He could feel the bones of

his head cracking beneath the strain. And his breath was almost exhausted. He gave himself up for lost.

And then suddenly the fingers of his free right hand in its futile struggling found one of the shark's eyes ; and instinctively he dug in with his long, unkempt nails. And that saved him, for in response to the sudden pain the shark relaxed its dreadful grip ; and with a final effort Treacle reached the surface, to be hauled aboard the boat and taken to Thursday Island's hospital, where I saw the doctor and a nurse work for hours on the sewing of his numberless wounds.

Yet, such was the stoicism of his race, that a few weeks later he was back at the diving !

" That shark nearly eat me," he said in explanation, " but he not going to make me lose my job too. No fear ! "

There was another risk that those " swim divers " ran. On one reef-encircled island where I had gone to refill my fresh-water tank, I found the natives death-wailing. Their faces were smeared with the clay and ashes of mourning, and the men were beating mournful notes on drums. The voices of women rose in high falsetto chorusing. One of the Islanders was dead out on the reef, they told me. He had been diving and had remained so long below that one of his companions in the dinghy went down to see what was wrong.

He found the man in the grip of a giant clam-shell—one of the great bivalves, often five feet across and several hundred pounds in weight, which lay on the bottom with their great corrugated "lips" wide apart, concealed by slime and seaweed, ready for anything that might come along. The Islander had inadvertently placed his foot in the jaws of the waiting trap, which closed with monstrous quickness and held him till he drowned. And so great was the strength of that vice-like grip that all efforts to release his body were unavailing. The prisoning shell was also a burial ground.

Though accidents were common, many of them fatal, there were men who had dived for years without mishap or untoward happening of any kind. I met natives who had never been within hailing distance of danger. I knew a dress-diver—a European—who had walked almost as far on the bottom of the sea as he had on dry land. There was not a shell-bed in the Strait he had not visited, not a submerged reef or sandbank his leaded boots had not trod. He knew the sea-floor as a city man knows his streets. He had names for the individual hills and valleys and chasms and plains of that strange underworld. In the manner of most explorers he had called them after himself and his friends.

He had seen many strange things down there in the depths. He was in hearty old age when I came

to know him ; but memories of his queer wanderings lived vividly within him, and for hours at a time he would sit smoking and drinking whisky-and-sodas, telling of wondrous coral grottoes shadowed in green ; of tapestried caves from which, when the light began to fail, came forth weird piscatorial Things with wide, staring eyes like those of men to whom death had come with tremendous surprise ; of dead, forgotten ships whose seaweeded bones were the monuments of his strange familiar land. . . .

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CHAPTER 13

Vigour of Life

FOR a long time I obtained but little shell. It seemed that divers had walked over the whole of the Strait but recently and cleaned it up with remarkable thoroughness. My Malay exhausted the most promising beds in a few drifts, finding shells always singly, never in numbers. At the end of two months I had barely sufficient of the bivalves to pay expenses, and of pearls none at all. I had endured eight weeks of discomfort and bad smell for nothing. The easy life and pleasant surroundings of my old trading-station at Adele seemed very desirable just then.

The Malay, whose recompense depended mainly on the number of the shells he found, grumbled mightily. Mine was a bad-luck boat, he said. It had a hoodoo on it and would never find shell in any quantity. It was no use trying to fight against a hoodoo, most powerful of all the evil spells of Malaya. He was merely wasting his time in having anything to do with such a craft, he said, and threatened to leave. It was only by the exercise of considerable patient diplomacy and the expenditure of much rum that I was able to induce him to stay. Had not experienced divers been extremely scarce I would have willingly let him go.

The Torres Islanders, on the other hand, were

sanguine we should have good fortune one day, declaring cheerily their belief that good things were always preceded by bad things, which meant that Bad was merely a harbinger of Good and therefore something to be welcomed.

Their philosophy being imbued with this spirit of careless sanguineness, existence for them was a thing wholly enjoyable and worth while. There was about them nothing of the unmirthfulness of the great, strenuous civilized places of the earth, where pleasure is regarded mainly as relaxation and change, and has to be deliberately sought. These Islanders had no need to seek pleasure. It was with them all the time ; it was an ordinary, everyday part of their lives. Save on special occasions, as in the event of the death of a relative or friend, I never saw one of them sad. Laughter came readily to their eyes and jests to their lips. Living natural lives they were naturally in love with life. They revelled in life. They *lived*.

They gloried in their seafaring. The sea provided some of the spirit of contest and agression without which their pleasure of life would have been incomplete. When the lugger heeled steeply to the press of the wind and the thrust of rearing seas, they would laugh delighted defiance and cast ribaldry at the menace of the waters. Never have I seen anything more inspiritingly virile than the steersman, his

splendid, upright body balanced perfectly to the convulsive movements of the deck, standing square-footed with the tiller between his knees, defeating the overwhelming of the seas with a careless ease which was expression of utmost skill. He was a god-man, omniscient, certain of his power.

And when a sea caught them partly unawares and sent its white top splashing aboard to wet them through, they laughed again, shook the drops from their hair, and credited the enemy with a minor victory. And when, on windless days, the sea lay flat and lifeless, they regarded it with ironical pity, called it a poor, defeated thing in need of rest after its vain strivings to destroy them, and made songs of its impotence.

They delighted in their "swim diving." They regarded it as a game. They tried seeing who could stay longest below. They competed in finding the greatest number of shells. They held underwater races. Like children on a beach they engaged in splashing matches and in playing tricks on one another. By very joy of life they solved the difficult problem of combining play with effective work.

And at night, when the opening of the discovered shells was done and they had had their evening meal and we rode at anchor in the shelter of some seaward reef or sandbank, they lay about the deck with hands for pillows and gossiped over the events of the day and

laughed again over humorous incidents, and in the manner of all wanderers of whatever coloured skin spoke of their homes and their people and tried to imagine what at the moment they were doing. Or if the sea was smooth and there was a moon, maybe they would arm themselves with spears, man the dinghy and go fishing on the reef—not because they particularly wanted fish, but in response to the call of the warm, bright night.

They put the same joy of life into their village dancing—so much so that if possible I avoided anchoring overnight at an island where a dance was in progress, as nothing would have prevented my crew joining in—with the result that no pearling would be done next day. They needed time to recover. The dancing was extremely strenuous and lasted often from one night to another.

At one place I saw what was known as the " coconut dance," though the name seemed to have been chosen haphazard, as the proceedings had nothing to do with coconuts so far as I could gather, save for certain vague references in the accompanying song. The night was calm and moonlit and the dancing-ground, a stretch of clean, white sand trodden hard by generations of naked, dancing feet, was all crossed by the tracery of palm-shadows, and edged by small, pale fires about which were grouped the onlooking villagers.

The dancing began just as I appeared. A pair of

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drummers squatted on either side of the ground, rapped out a sharp tattoo and then descended into a slow pulsing ; and from behind one of the houses appeared two score women and girls wearing girdles of grass and shredded fibres above the cloth dresses which were evidences of their acquaintanceship with the ways of civilization, and about their arms and necks strings of small pieces of coral and tiny tinkling shells, and in their hair croton leaves and blue convolvulus flowers. Four abreast they came, a trifle shyly it seemed to me, beating their hands to the time of the drumming and murmuring a low, sweet song.

Their dancing was disappointing. It was as though they were half afraid, as though they believed themselves present only on sufferance. All they did was mildly sway their hips and occasionally slap their breasts with their hands. It was extremely tame and uninspiring—so much so indeed that the onlookers showed restlessness at its continuance, and a man near me muttered that dancing was not a thing for women ; their place, he said in effect, was the home and the yam-garden.

Suddenly, as though they could forbear no longer, a number of youths surged forward and drove the women away ; and then, after a pause, during which the women took their places resignedly amongst the crowd, the drums throbbed out a quicker beat and all

eyes turned towards the further end of the dancing ground.

And then out of the shadows came the real dancers—the males, old men and young, a hundred or more of them, some wearing painted wooden masks, some with their hair bedecked with flowers and feathers, some with their naked bodies smeared with coloured paints, all carrying shields and spears and other weapons, and about their wrists and ankles circlets of large triangular beans which rattled briskly to every movement.

Like the women, they came four abreast ; but their coming was as vigorous as that of the women was mild. A half-step at a time they advanced, lifting their feet high like prancing horses and bringing them down with a most tremendous thudding, bowing their heads and shaking their headgear, putting all their energy into every movement, and all the while roaring the dance-song—a half-chant, half-yell of deep-throated unrestrained joy through which the tattooing of the drums ran a savage note of defiance.

Then, on reaching the dance-ground, the first four pranced back ; and the next four taking the lead there began a series of agile cavortings of arms and legs and bodies, some distinctly sensual in their bearing, all in perfect time and unison and accompanied by hideous facial distortion and such strenuous rolling of eyes that they quickly grew bloodshot from the

strain. Then the leaders retreated in their turn and the third four took their place and the curvetings were repeated—and so on till every man of that hundred had been one of the leading quartette.

After which they rested and partook of the feast that had been provided and smoked and "yarned" and flirted with the girls—till the impatient beating of the drums called them to repetition of their glad labours—the first of a series of repetitions that lasted till well after the dawn of the following day.

"Very good dance that one," said one of my crew after a night of this kind. "Proper good one. All the bones inside my legs and my arms come so sore I can hardly stand up." Which was his subtle way of indicating that he had enjoyed himself to such extent that he would like to be excused from turning the air-pump handles for a day.

Bananas, yams, sweet-potatoes, coconuts, fish and other indigenous foods were in great abundance at the feasts accompanying these dances. Often the principal item on the menu was dugong—a kind of sea cow. These curious mammals weighed up to seven hundred pounds, had a skin like a pig's, and, when smoke-cured, flesh closely resembling bacon both in appearance and taste.

My crew-boys were adepts at their capture. They harpooned them—with a six-inch harpoon attached to a long, thin rope and fitting loosely into a hole at the

thicker end of a stout pole, maybe twelve feet in length.

When a dugong was sighted floating near the surface the hunters approached cautiously in the dinghy, and a man standing for'rd drove the pole hard down on its back, sending the harpoon well into its flesh. The astonished dugong tore away with the rope, dragging the dinghy with it—a mad, exhilarating, splashing dragging, with much twisting, turning and sudden leaping, and the bow so steeply dipped that a nose-dive and complete disaster seemed always imminent, till tiring at last, the creature was overtaken, killed by a dexterous twisting of its tail, and towed ashore. My crew often eked out my larder with the capture of a dugong.

They would eat anything. They lived too healthily and happily to contract indigestion. Their digestions were hall-marked, acid-proof, and warranted to stand all strains. They devoured fish and meat in almost the final stages of decay as though they were the last word in delicacies. Food over-cooked, under-cooked, or plain raw was all the same to them. More than once I saw them bake a "damper" so badly that while the outside was burned black the inside was a doughy, sticky mess; whereupon they cheerfully soaked the hard outside in tea and ate the dreadful interior with a spoon.

They valued food only according to its bulk.

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Once, it being Christmas, and thinking to give them a treat, I presented them with a ham, boiled whole. They chopped it in four parts with an axe, took one each and devoured it straight away. They were not really hungry, either ; they had had their Christmas dinner only an hour before.

While the people of these islands took their abundant pleasure of life buoyantly and vigorously, they took their sorrows with a simplicity often tremendous in its quiet pathos.

At one island I came across a lonely grave in the soft sand above the high-water mark—a new grave shaded by tall palms and bordered by glass bottles so sunken that their tops were just above the surface. A man, nude but for a loin-cloth, the brown of his skin lost beneath a smearing of white ashes, sat silently near by. He was looking at a single hibiscus blossom, its scarlet flaming somewhat dimmed, that lay on the fresh-made mound, and at a piece of board which did duty for a headstone, on which was painstakingly carved this inscription :

LILLY
VERY KIND WIFE
OF
JIMMY.

I don't think I have ever seen anything more profound of pathos than that one word " Kind."

But though they gambolled their way through life,

they were not unduly careless. They knew there were limits which should not be overstepped. In diving, for instance, they would not attempt depths positively dangerous. They thought the Japanese divers who worked the deep-water off Darnely Island mad.

The deepest working diving in the world was being carried on at Darnely. In some cases the depths reached were 35 fathoms !

The death rate from over-pressure was tremendous, and there were instances of that fatalism and contempt for human life which is said to be a trait of the Japanese character—the trait which caused the physician of the late Mikado to disembowel himself for failing to cure his royal patient.

On one occasion a diver was hauled up dead in the dress. The shell-bed was rich, and a second Japanese on board went down to continue the work. He too was brought up dead from the terrible pressure. Not in the least deterred, a third donned the dress—with the same result. Only that there was no one left to tend the air-pipe and line, no doubt a fourth would have made the attempt to clean up that fatal bed.

" I think Japanese too much big fool," commented one of my crew. " They too much big fool altogether." Then, confused recollection of something he had heard in a church coming to him, he added :

" What shall it profit a man if he find plenty shell and make plenty money and then come dead ? "

CHAPTER 14

A Sermon or Two

MY crew were great church-goers. When I anchored at an island on a Sunday they always attended the service. Most of the churches were in charge of native preachers under white missioners who visited them only at long intervals. I sometimes went to the services, which pleased the natives immensely.

At one island the church was of palm-leaf laid on a frame of mangrove saplings, built right on the ground, and was without seats, organ or choir. The congregation squatted on the sand, the men on one side, the women on the other. In keeping with my dignity as a white man, an old chair was dug up for me and placed alongside the pulpit ; and the nearest of the squatted girls held in her hands an opened coconut in case I should need to drink.

The preacher was a wild-looking individual, unkempt of hair and beard, with the bottoms of a pair of dirty and frayed khaki trousers peeping beneath the edge of his cassock. He was barefooted. The congregation rose as he entered ; and the only sound as he marched impressively to the pulpit was the thudding of his great black feet on the hard-trodden sand.

I have heard many native sermons, but never such

a one as this man delivered. From the pulpit he took occasion to ventilate a personal grievance. The people had not been treating him as he deserved, he complained. As preacher in charge of the island, for instance, it was only right and proper that they supplied him with food. Abundant food. It was not to be expected he should labour in the gardens and fish and hunt like a common man. He had enough to do looking after their spiritual welfare. Quite enough.

But they did not supply him with food—at least with enough food. They gave him hardly anything. They were a selfish people. In the gardens were plenty of yams, and sweet-potatoes, and paw-paws, and bananas. The fishermen came always heavily laden with their catch. But little did they offer to their good Missioner. Very little indeed. He could starve for all they cared. He could eat grass. Well, so be it. But such selfish people would one day be punished.

" When you die you will go to that one big fire," he warned them solemnly. " And there will be nothing to eat. Nothing at all. You will come hungry, even as you have made me come hungry. You, too, will eat grass. And the grass will come dry in your stomachs. Then the fire will go down your mouths and set alight to that dry grass. And smoke and fire will come from your ears. Smoke and fire will come from your noses. Smoke and fire will come from

your mouths. And it will burn for ever and ever, amen. I tell you you will all come damn' sorry you not been give plenty tucker to me. I have speak finish. Now, altogether stand up, open hymns-books and sing strong feller, and not forget what I been say."

And the dreadful warning was duly effective ; next time I visited that island I found the preacher happy and contented in the high seat of abundance.

These Missioners showed considerable ingenuity in applying Biblical parables to troubles of everyday life. For instance, a common grievance throughout the Strait was the fact that, the Islanders having little idea of monetary values and thus being easy prey for unscrupulous—mainly Chinese—traders, a Government regulation compelled employers to pay their natives' wages to a Thursday Island official, who banked it for them and exercised rigorous control over withdrawals ; the Islanders declared that as they had earned the money, they should have the free spending of it. One of the native preachers stressed the matter by adapting the parable of the Ten Talents something in this fashion :

" One good feller marster he got ten man working for him, and one day he line all them ten man up in one place and he talk to them like this : ' Now I go away for make holiday and to all you man I give one half-crown each. Anything you want to do with that

half-crown, all-right you do it. And when I come back I see which man been do the best and might be I give him a present.' So, he go away ; and after two, three months, he come back and he line up them ten man in one place again, and he ask them what they been do with them half-crowns. That first man he open his hand and show seven half-crowns. And that marster he very glad longa that man and ask him which way he make one half-crown into seven half-crown. And that man say : ' Master, I been play cards, and I win them half-crowns.' And that marster he say : ' You good feller man number one ; you come sit top-side longa me.' Then he speak to the next man ; and that next man he got five half-crowns and he say he been buy some pearlshell very cheap and sell it at good price. ' That man I been buy that pearlshell from not got good eye—he close-up blind—and he not savee which one good pearlshell and which one bad pearlshell ; and that's which way I been get it cheap.' And right along that line every man been make good profit—except the last man. That poor feller he only got the one half-crown his marster been give him. And that marster say : ' What's matter you got only one half-crown, while all them other feller got plenty half-crown ? ' And that one man say : ' I been put my half-crown longa bank in Thursday Island.' And that marster he come proper angery. He swear proper. ' What's matter you put

money longa bank?' he say. 'You put money longa bank and not make profit, not make anything. You put in half-crown, you take out half-crown. Oh, you too much bloody fool! I give you the sack!'"

Only in few of the churches was an offertory taken; it wasn't worth while. At one place, however, an old man, at a signal from the pulpit, tugged from the pocket of the ancient sac coat which was his only garment a small saucer and went the rounds of the congregation. After the service I examined its contents. There was sixpence-halfpenny. A congregation of two hundred had contributed a ha'penny, for I had put in the sixpence!

Attached to one church was an elderly individual called "The Prodder," whose duty it was to awaken and expel those who went to sleep during the service. Whenever his searching eyes discovered a sleeper, he quietly approached and sharply prodded him awake with the butt end of a heavy, silver-mounted stick, and then with an imperious gesture indicated the door. Whereupon the offender against religious decorum rose and walked down the aisle separating the men from the women—walked slowly, with hanging head and abashed manner, knowing full well that for the whole of the ensuing week he was to be a target for the mockery of the village. "The Prodder" was a most dreaded person indeed. His "prod" had been given to him by the Bishop of the diocese, and he

was fond of relating the details of the ceremony accompanying its presentation.

All of my crew had been to school and could read and write after a fashion. Often they would beg of me books and old newspapers and sit up half the night spelling out the easiest words by the light of a hurricane lantern hung from a beam. One told me proudly that once he had read a book right through—a big book lent him by a Missionary, with an extraordinarily large number of murders and fights in it, and hairbreadth escapes and sieges of cities and great battles and other exciting events, many of which were authenticated by pictures. He thought the book very bloodthirsty indeed and, but for the pictures, would have regarded it as mostly untrue. He stated, also, he was greatly surprised that white people should behave in such an outrageous manner, and added a hope that the police would prevent a recurrence of the trouble. The book was "The Pilgrims' Progress."

There were schools on all the largest and most populous islands of the Strait, with Europeans in charge. The buildings were usually an inartistic mixture of grass-thatch and galvanized iron, and the ages of the scholars ranged from that of tiny toddlers to that of full-bosomed girls and strongly adolescent young men—a little item which necessitated the teachers being persons of quick perceptions in certain matters, the introduction of civilization not being

without a deleterious effect on the sexual morality of these young Islanders.

The teacher at the most central island of the Strait, several days' sail from other white habitation, was a woman—a dear old white-haired lady, gentle of manner and speech and pathetically frail of body. She was the only European there, and had lived in her isolation many years ; only when the infrequent store-ship arrived, or an occasional pearler, did she see some one of her own skin. And besides isolation she had endured all kinds of privation and hardship ; there were times when she lay ill to the point of death with only the rough Islanders to tend her ; there were times when bad weather so delayed the store-ship that she was forced to subsist for long periods on crude native foods. Yet she endured them cheerfully and without complaint.

Besides being the school-teacher, she was also Governor, Magistrate and Registrar and a few other things. Her Islanders loved her and obeyed her will without question ; but her mission of instilling into these half-savage people something of the principles, customs and manners of civilization sometimes had queer results.

On my landing to visit and take to her what news I had of the outer world, the whole of the islanders came to meet me. They were dressed in white ; and the blackness of their faces and hands contrasted

strangely with their clothing. They made a study in black and white.

Crowding round, each and every one insisted on shaking my hand. The hands of old men, old women, youths and girls, fought with one another to grip mine. Little round-stomached children thrust chubby fists and became entangled in my feet. It threatened to be an orgy of handshaking.

I fought them off and demanded explanation; whereupon they told me that the White Lady had taught them that civilized people always greeted one another by shaking hands. They wanted to show me how far they had progressed in the civilized arts. They had overdone it, that was all.

In some of the houses in this village were beds with a broad plank round the edge, like a ship's bunk. It was to prevent the sleepers falling out of bed, they told me. The White Lady objected to them sleeping on the floor, as was their age-old custom; it was unhealthy, she said. But to people accustomed to turning about the floor at will when they slept, beds were dangerous things. Hence the boards. One man confided to me that while no doubt civilization was a very fine thing, certain aspects of it were troublesome and made for extra work.

It was no easy task to induce these people to really accept modernity. They were choked right up with superstition and legend, though their legends were

often truer in their application to the facts of life than are those of civilization which show Good conquering Evil. Some of these island tales showed Vice Triumphant, and good old honest Virtue badly beaten. There was, for instance, the one concerning the Greed of Mutuk, which was told me one night in all earnestness by an old native sitting on the mat-strewn floor of his one-roomed house, with all about him eagerly listening youths and girls.

Mutuk, it appeared, was an exceedingly greedy person who ate so much that there was nothing left for his wives and children. One of his habits was to visit alone a certain rock-hole on a distant part of the beach, spear a large number of the fish which dwelt there, make a fire, cook them, eat them, rub charcoal about his lips to take away the fishy smell, and return to his wives with a story of ill-luck at his fishing. But the very presence of the charcoal about his lips made his wives suspicious, so that they followed him one day and discovering his secret, consulted a sorcerer as to suitable means of punishment.

The sorcerer announced that if matters were left in his hands he would cure Mutuk of his greed, and to this end made arrangements with certain fishes. And so it happened that when Mutuk went next to the rock hole, an extra large king-fish appeared so temptingly close to the surface that he abandoned his spear and jumped into the water, thinking to grasp

it with his hands, as often he had done before. But as soon as he touched the water, an enormous shark rushed up and swallowed him and made for the open sea.

So far all was well ; the king-fish and the shark had done their parts satisfactorily ; and it only remained for Mutuk to be taken for a few days' cruise and be brought back in a state of real hunger which would be a lesson to him for life.

But the sorcerer had never thought that the very greediness for which Mutuk was being punished would upset the whole scheme. Mutuk devoured all the fish and other food that came down the shark's throat, so, instead of the man, it was the shark that began to feel the pangs of hunger. And presently it became so weakened by lack of food that it could no longer swim, and finally became stranded upon a shallow sandbank. Whereupon Mutuk cut his way out with a bone of one of the fishes he had eaten, which operation killed the shark, took his captor's jawbone for possible use as a weapon, and swam to a near-by island, the people of which acclaimed him as a great hero who had killed a shark with his bare hands, and gave him a number of young and handsome wives, with whom he lived happily ever after.

Curiously enough, some of their legends paralleled Biblical history. They had their stories of a First Man, a universal Flood, and a Samson.

The strong man was alleged to have inhabited the island of Badu, and one of his feats was to hold the island single-handedly against an invading force. He was a shifter of mountains, a slayer of enormous sharks, and a murderer of great tonnage. Amongst his victims was his own mother, and what is said to be her fossilized head now serves as portion of the supporting column of the baptismal font at one of the island churches. He met his death at last by treachery ; and though there is no direct mention of a Delilah, it is generally understood a lady was concerned in the affair. The Badu people showed me the spot where the last scene took place, and declared that the colour of certain red-leafed weeds in the vicinity was due to the splashing of the strong man's blood.

CHAPTER 15

Roaming the Shell Beds

MY searching of the pearling beds took me all over the Strait. I visited seaward areas where the water was so clear that the diver's stumbling explorings were plain at fifteen fathoms and more. I visited shallows near the Australian coast, the southern boundary of the Strait, where visibility on the bottom was destroyed so frequently by flooding rivers yellowing the sea that diving was possible only for limited periods. I worked in the vicinity of islands named after the day of their discovery—Tuesday Island, and Wednesday Island, and Friday Island. I cruised the neighbourhood of islands scant of foliage, rocky and uninviting, with approaches made dangerous by scraps of low-lying reefs. I came to islands whose rich volcanic soil covered them with prodigal greenery and made of them fat, luscious islands which looked down on the sea and all about with the serenity of contentment.

I sailed the waters of the New Guinea coast, the northern boundary of the Strait, and called at islands so close to the Papuan shore and the villages of marauding tribes that the Government at one time provided the inhabitants with firearms for their protection. Some of the islanders told me tales of those marauding tribes—horrible, gruesome tales in which

the severing, and carrying away for eating as special delicacies, of the firm breasts of newly adolescent girls, and the taking of men's heads for the ornamentation of "dubus" were principal features. One was of a white man—a Government official—who, wading after the head-hunters' fleeing canoes in the punitive repelling of a raid, stuck waist-deep in treacherous mud and dropped his rifle in his struggle to be free; whereupon the canoe-men returned and decapitated him with a bamboo knife as he stood. I have heard nothing more grimly realistic than the Islanders' description of the manner in which the headless trunk remained upright in the mud.

At one island I attended a queer wedding. The bridegroom was a young ne'er-do-well who for some good reason of his own had left the haunts of civilization to laze away his days as an island beachcomber. The bride was a native damsel, stout and somewhat ungainly, with a pathetic smattering of European ways and manners. The man wore a dress suit—relic of his respectable past—with white starched shirt and bow tie complete. But he had no boots. He hadn't had boots for years and didn't see why he should obtain a pair for a mere occasion like this. The girl wore a concertina-pleated skirt of imitation silk, a violently red blouse so cut as to reveal a triangle of dark-brown breast, and a wide-brimmed, grass-green hat. She also was without boots—or stockings either.

Knowing only too well the unhappinesses resulting from unions of this kind, the visiting missionary sought to dissuade them. But that young man didn't care what became of the wreck of his life. A shred of ironical humour came to his alcohol-soaked mind.

" ' But my true love has grown to such excess I cannot sum up half my sum of wealth,' " he quoted sardonically—and with this finely idealistic love-speech of Juliet's on his lips took the plunge into wedded degradation.

At another place I came across what at first seeming was an attempt at wholesale murder. The natives hereabouts all engaged in " swim diving " for pearl-shell as their major occupation ; always about my vessel as I drifted over the beds were numbers of canoes. One day there arose a great shouting and yelling and cries of imperative warning, and the water became dotted with black heads making for the canoes with all possible haste ; and presently a dozen or more exceedingly angry men stood on my deck, all talking at once and more or less coherently asking me to make a complaint to the Magistrate at Thursday Island when next I saw him.

The occupants of one canoe had done a dastardly thing, they said. They had poured blood into the water. Dugong's blood—half a bucket of it. Even here from the deck they could see the redness of the water. It was a bad thing to pour blood in the

water. A very bad thing indeed. Blood brought sharks. Half a bucket was enough to bring all the sharks in the Strait, and bring them with exceeding quickness. Sharks smelt blood a long way off as they smelt nothing else.

"Suppose we not get inside canoes very quick them sharks eat us up one-time!" said the angered divers. "Any man who chuck blood in the water must go gaol. That's what for we ask you speak to Gumment man."

I had the offending canoe-men brought on board. They denied pouring over any blood. They wouldn't dream of doing such a foolish thing, they said. Oh, dear no! They didn't want to go to gaol. They had merely played a trick to frighten the other divers off a little shell-patch they had discovered and wanted to keep for themselves. They had put into the water a medicine a missionary had given them for treating wounds to the skin. They had found that a very small quantity of the medicine would instantly redden a wide area of water. They showed me some of the stuff in proof. It was Condy's Crystals!

I worked about the inner edge of the Great Barrier Reef, the most extensive coral formation in the world, which for a thousand miles sheltered the north-east Australian coast from the deep Pacific swell and made of Torres Strait a gigantic lagoon. Its top flush with the surface, it was on its outer side a great steep wall,

five hundred fathoms down maybe—a winding, sinuous wall, varying as much in width as in course ; in some places its top was a strip of a hundred feet or less, so narrow indeed that some of the white crashing of the breakers splashed across into the smooth water of the inner edge ; in others it stretched wide and flat like a field for maybe half a mile. To follow its outline was like following the looping bays and promontories of a much-indented coast. Here and there were openings in the wall—miles-wide gateways which allowed the pounding outer seas free passage to the calm of the shallows. And all about were numberless offspring reefs—little reefs and large reefs ; reefs completely circular and so close one to another that their lagoons made successions of glittering loops ; solitary reefs curved like sickle moons ; reefs hopelessly and gorgeously amorphous ; reefs primly straight—with winding through them and about, incredibly vagrant of direction, narrow, watery lanes that in the brilliance of the sunshine were ribbons of living light.

The Barrier Reef was the embodiment of calm strength destroying force, of immobility in successful opposition to moving mass. Never was there destruction like that of the rollers which eternally crashed on its long length. The rollers didn't expect it. They swept up confidently, majestic in their swinging stride. They feared nothing. They had might ;

they had momentum ; they had the weight of the whole Pacific behind them. They were mobile mountains, smooth of movement and irresistible.

Then they met the reef—met it with a suddenness that caused them to halt a moment as in pained surprise —and as their foundations were knocked away the blue roundness of their shape gave place to an irregular sagging flecked with white ; then, roaring, they crashed forward on their faces in hopeless welters of foam ; and in a single instant all their majesty and might were transformed into flat, white water slowly stilling into patterns like lace.

The coral made of the sea-floor a place of enchantment ; at any daylight hour I could look over the side at an intricacy in living rock of delicate flowers and ferns bright with colours, and antlers perfectly formed even to the tiniest and frailest of the projecting points, and white bowls as exactly shaped as though moulded on a potter's wheel, and tall translucent things like stalagmites, and trees in miniature, and yellow-massed ovoid things like heads of fair women, and tapestried abbeys shaded in subtle green, and king's palaces bejewelled to the roofs. And through it all went gay-coloured fish and slimy, floating things with projections like human hands ; and the opalescence of the water softened and toned the colours ; and the motion of the tide gave such semblance of movement and change that even as I looked an antler

became a palace and the ovoid things like women's heads turned to opening flowers.

I met some strange characters in my adventuring among the reefs. There was one, a hard-bitten mariner of a fast-disappearing type, once master of a large passenger steamer, who declared he was a pearler merely because he rebelled against having "owners" whose will was law, and that he was tired of being nice to passengers when he didn't want to be, and of shaving every day, and of dressing for dinner, and of other amenities which he vehemently declared "damfoolery."

"A sailor's a sailor; not a social butterfly!" he would exclaim. "What's wearing a pleat in my trousers got to do with navigation?"

There was one who, believing economy should begin at home, manned his craft with his native wife and half-caste family. My coming across them was occasion for considerable embarrassment, for I approached from behind the shoulder of an island and they did not see me till I had been made fully aware that the two members of the family resting on the rail, unclothed just as they had come up from their "swim diving," were well-developed, good-looking girls in their 'teens.

And there was a tall, muscular, old chap, remarkably agile for his years, with unkempt hair and beard and blue eyes alight with a strange fire, who had the

reputation of being a trifle "off his head." Perhaps he was. I don't know. All I know is that he was the most remarkable violinist I have ever heard, or ever expect to hear.

It was sitting on the deck of his lugger one calm dark night at the anchorage of a lonely Barrier Island that I heard him play. I had come across from my own vessel for the sake of an hour's companionship; and we were talking of things and matters in general when he broke off in the middle of a sentence to ask if I liked music. Without awaiting my reply, he went below, brought up his violin and standing right aft began to play.

It was not orthodox playing. He knew nothing of musical "traditions" or "correct" renderings. He didn't know there were such things. He had never had a lesson in his life, he told me. He couldn't read printed music. I don't think he even held the instrument properly.

But it was wonderful music. It was mad, wild, exotic music. It was wholly his own. It was his interpretation of the mightiness, and the terribleness, and the grandeur, and the loveliness of the sea. He had only the one theme, but I'll swear he never played it twice the same. It was a theme full of strange rhythms, and stranger inter-rhythms, and throbbing roarings, and high wailings, and elfin laughter. There was in it the despairing moan of tumbling surf, and

the triumphant shouting of deep-water rollers, and the sweet rippling of tides, and the chuckling of wavelets. He found the subtle link between a thing of nature and the human soul. By some strange witchery of his own he conjured up the nebulous spirit of the sea and gave it definite form. He made it tangible and real. He gave it passions and emotions.

And those passions and emotions translated themselves to me and brought crowding irrelevant memories, and mad, glad thoughts and desires, and urge to the doing forthwith of some heroic deed, and told me of the love and hate of women, and filled me with a medley of strivings and sensations that caused me to tremble as from cold, and all the while made me want to shriek or sob—it didn't matter which. I was glad when, exhausted, he stopped. I don't think I should care to hear such music again.

CHAPTER 16

The Big Wind

I WROTE many more stories during those restless, exciting, kaleidoscopic days, and they all came back with remarkable persistence. I was in the midst of a story-land dripping with themes and incidents and strange characters, but I couldn't persuade editors I had the trick of putting them on paper. Still, I persisted and lived in hope. Hope was the chief inspiriting factor of my vagabonding. It entered largely into the business of pearl-shelling, for success or failure in pearl-shelling was mainly a matter of chance. There was never any telling. The most unpromising morning might presage a highly successful evening ; a whole day or succession of days without a single shell might be followed by the discovery in a single " drift " of sufficient to compensate for the ill-luck of weeks and leave a handsome profit ; with the opening of each shell was the chance there would be revealed, clinging to the body of the fish, or hidden in a " blister " on the surface of the shell itself, a fortune-making pearl. Regarded from a strictly business standpoint, I suppose pearling was commercially unsound. A sound business should have some degree of certainty about it ; there should be some means of calculating what the immediate future might reasonably bring forth. There was no certainty about

pearling—save that it was certain to be uncertain. The whole thing was a gamble.

And though I found no large and valuable pearls or great quantities of shell, I would have been content to go on with the gamble indefinitely, but for the incidence of what whites called a "Big Wind," and natives a "Larrakin," meaning thereby a Hurricane.

It was Long Joe who discovered its approach. Long Joe was my new diver, and I had picked him up in an hotel of sorts in a port of sorts, "broke to the wide," as he put it, but "cheerful and ready for anything that'll come along"; and the necessity for picking him up was due to the fact that my Malayan diver had acted up to my first estimate of him by stealing the only pearl of value I ever found and, when charged with the theft, "running amok" to such homicidal intent that, with the assistance of my faithful crew, I was compelled to secure him and deliver him to the Authorities, who placed him in an asylum for criminal lunatics, where a year later he died.

Long Joe was white, he was young, and his name was really Joe Long; it was inordinate length of limb that caused him to be known by his surname first. He had been reared in and about the reefs, was a good diver and splendid at the handling of small boats—which demands more real sailor skill than the handling of large boats—and he had an amazingly

thorough knowledge of the waters and winds and tides of the Barrier Reef.

"There's the makings of a Big Wind somewheres," was his warning, "and I don't reckon I'm makin' a mistake when I say she's heading this way. We'll need to keep our eyes skinned. They come sudden and hot and strong at times."

We were two days' sail south of Torres Strait, lying across an easy wind, well within an area known to be the stamping ground of hurricanes, and at the time of the year they favoured. I felt a certain apprehension, not altogether at the threat of possible disaster, but at the coming of something to me unknown as it was mighty. For, in all my sea-wanderings I had never met a hurricane, though I had been in any number of little local storms which seemed bad enough at the time, and vicious successions of white squalls and rain squalls, and trade winds of such insistent fierceness that for days on end I ran with canvas double-reefed and masts ominously bent. I was coming to something strange in the way of winds; and I feared its strangeness.

I saw no hint of it yet. The morning was bright and clear; the sea was a disc of glittering blue, lightly flecked with the white of dancing wavelets; save for low down on the horizon to the south and west, the sky was infinite in its cloudlessness—and even the few low-down clouds were light, airy things devoid of evil

presaging. It was a smiling day like any other smiling day.

But that was the way of Big Winds, said Long Joe. Sometimes they gave yer warnin' and sometimes they didn't. They were tricky things were Big Winds. They had a way of sneakin' on yer when you wasn't expectin' 'em. You ran a chance of bein' caught if you depended on them barometer things. A Big Wind could deceive barometers dead easy if it liked, though he supposed they were all right for them that needed 'em. He didn't need no barometers. No fear ! He had a better way.

When you were on the sea-floor, he said, you could tell a Big Wind was comin' from the way the reef fish began rushin' about, excited like, and dodgin' in and out the coral like they was callin' at one another's houses and tellin' folks to look out and fix their doors and winders real tight ; and from the way the crabs and other things in shells found soft places and dug deep down so as to be well out of the road ; and from the way the shovel-nosed sharks and stingarees got up off the bottom and wandered around like they was scared and didn't know what to do; and from bits of outside deep-water seaweed that hadn't no business there inside the reef at all ; and from a funny kind of low swell that kept close to the bottom and never reached the top, so that from the deck you'd never know it was there. A

feller that knew the sea-floor didn't want no barometers !

Well, he'd seen all them things down there this morning, and he reckoned the best thing to do would be to make for one of the Barrier Islands and lie tight at anchor till it was all over.

" No good tryin' to weather it amongst the reefs," he explained. " The hook 'll never hold unless we're out of some of the wind behind a bit of land."

So we made for a high, peaked island called the Lizard, eight miles to windward. Before we had covered half the distance, the light, airy clouds to the south and west gave place to heavy, black-edged massings which took the blue brilliance from the sea and left it leaden grey. And the wind eased down and then dropped to a flat calm. The sweep of the tide threatened to take us past the island and away. The crew-boys manned the dinghy and took the lugger in tow. It was plain we had not much time.

They worked hard. They bent to the oars as never I had seen men bend to oars before. They took off their loin-cloths, shirts and trousers and toiled naked as on the day of their nativity. The muscles of their forearms stood out like cords. Perspiration made their bodies shine like polished bronze. They grunted encouragement one to another at every stroke.

It was all of little use. It was a few hundred pounds striving with half a hundred tons dead weight.

The lugger was unresponsive. She held back, heavy, unwilling, sluggish. To each slow tautening of the heavy tow-rope she made maybe a yard of forward progress, or maybe none at all.

We steadily lost ground. While the lugger's nose pointed to the island, the tide swept her sideways along it. We looked one way and travelled another. And all the while the cloud massings spread with amazing quickness, and at the westward meeting-place of sea and sky was a tinge of green. I didn't like that green. It was sickly, unhealthy, like the green of a wound. It made me shiver, despite the closeness and oppressing heat. And soon the sun was completely lost behind the advancing clouds and the sea took on a dull glassiness like the eyes of a dead fish.

Long Joe was unperturbed.

" We'll get a breeze directly," he said. " It might take us in, and again it might not, for it'll be made up of squalls. It'd be as well to shorten some of the canvas."

The dinghy was hauled on board and the foresail taken off, the mainsail double-reefed and the jib reduced to the point of inadequacy. Half an hour later came the first of the wind.

It was a gust that made white water in the scurry of its passage—a vicious, screaming gust which sharply smacked the sails, sent the lugger heeling forward for a minute and was gone. Then came an interval

of dull, menacing calm, with the sea swaying uneasily, and another gust tore down, and after it a succession of gusts.

Long Joe reeved a steering tackle, took the tiller, lay up for the entrance in the reef about the island, and gave an exhibition of his ability to sail on snatches of wind. It was a wonderful exhibition. Each of the gusts varied from its predecessor in direction, strength or continuance, or in all three at once, and the intervals between them were irregular. A less experienced man would have been caught aback or abeam repeatedly, to the probable losing of a sail or a mast. Long Joe anticipated each one correctly, and it was with her nose that the lugger met the first of their attack. And out of every one he drew some forward progress, lying daringly close to those that came ahead, flying with a free sheet from those that came astern. Within an hour we had reeled through the opening in the reef on a sea that seemed to come from nowhere and were double-anchored in six fathoms, on a hard, sandy bottom, four hundred yards from the shore.

"Better have something to eat now," advised Joe, when all had been made secure. "We mightn't get the chance later on. She's going to be a rip-snorter. Hear the surf talkin' on the wind'ard beach?"

In the intervals of calm it sounded plain, an alter-

native booming and crashing, coming right across the island, three miles or more.

" That's the sea travelling ahead of her," said Joe.

By a little after midday the gusts had merged one into another and formed a howling gale charged with thin, fine rain, and the clouds had grown appreciably blacker and lower and the tinge of green had spread. A kind of twilight settled down. At three o'clock the wind dropped suddenly to a dead calm, and a while later as suddenly returned. At five it was again calm, a horrible, sticky calmness filled with muttering thunder and snaky lightning.

Soon after sundown the wind hauled to the eastward and the main body of the hurricane came down. Its roaring was plain a full minute before it arrived. It had a deeper and more booming note than that of the gale or the gusts. And its coming brought the clouds still closer and lower about us, and transformed the twilight into sudden night. We could see nothing. The island was blotted out. The horizon was gone. We were shut in a black-walled, black-roofed cell.

It was not like an ordinary wind. It was not like wind at all. There was no elasticity about it. It lacked resilience. It was hard and solid. It was like a moving wall.

There was no resisting it. At first impact the lugger seemed to lift clean out of the water ; then she heeled steeply on her side as she swung to meet it

bow-on. The bare masts bent as though under press of canvas. Backstays and other rod-taut gear curved like bows. A rope-end worked from the folds of the mainsail stood out stiff a moment and thrashed into nothingness. One of the crew was blown flat against the rail and held there like a plaster. On freeing himself he was lifted off his feet, thrown on his face and sent scooting along the deck, to fetch up against the cabin-top. Whites and blacks, we scurried below. There was no safety on deck. An incautious grip meant a broken limb, if not going overboard. To face the wind meant risk of burst lungs.

"Them anchors now," said Joe when we reached the cabin. "I hope they hold. A sandy bottom ain't too good."

I had been thinking the same thought. Mud, or sand and mud, was good holding. Clean, hard sand, such as was here at Lizard Island, was bad. The flukes couldn't dig in, and there was no grip in the lie of the chain along the bottom. I worried to know whether we were drifting. In the cabin there was no means of telling. There was only the tumult of the wind and sea. I couldn't keep my mind off those anchors, and at seven o'clock I decided to have a look.

It was raining when I crept up on deck—but not raining ordinarily. It was a horizontal rain, hard, vicious, stinging, and it brought blood from my hands and face. I wriggled forward to the bow. It was

a slow, painstaking journey. I had to make definitely sure of every grip.

And between the flashes of lightning it was pitch dark. It was not mere absence of light, but a positive darkness that did not depend on the negation of something else. I found the windlass with my head. I didn't see it before. I couldn't see anything at all. In those dark spells it was as though all light had been banished from the cosmos. Even the sea lacked its usual phosphorescence.

One of the crew had taken it upon himself to discover the behaviour of the anchors and was lying beside the fair lead conducting the starboard chain over the side. I stretched beside him, laid my ear to his mouth and gathered a confused sound evidently meant for "All right!" I rolled to the other side and with ear and hand examined the port fair lead. Beyond a certain jerking to the sea movement the chain lay in it tautly enough. Both anchors were holding.

Now if the wind had been an ordinary, straight gale, I think we would have held our position without any great difficulty, for we were directly in the shelter of the high land and therefore in no seaway. But this was not a straight wind. It travelled in a circle; wherefore as it gradually swung round to seaward the land lost its value as a shelter, and we were in the same position as if we had remained out among the reefs. And as the lugger swung to face the wind,

it was apparent the anchors were holding no longer. They began to snatch-and-hold, advertising it by jerking the chains through the fair leads in a manner every seaman knows and fears.

I crawled aft and down into the cabin again. Joe had seen by the compass that we had swung, and knew thereby that the wind had changed.

"Our only hope is that she goes round behind the island again before we drag on to the beach," he said. "I'll just have a peep round."

In ten minutes he was back. "She's going round, but dead slowly," he said. "And we're dragging all the time. I reckon we're half way to the beach already. My, she's a wind!"

We were helpless. Every inch of chain was out, and there was nothing we could do on deck. Indeed, it was more dangerous than ever on deck, for there was now the decided possibility that the masts would go. Undoubtedly until the time of her striking the safest place was down below. Yet we went up. We just couldn't stay below. We went up and crouched on the wet deck in the moderate shelter of the cabin-top, and we found the whole of the crew-boys there, too.

And there we waited, a wind-swept, rain- and wave-drenched bunch of humans whose one desire was that the circling of the wind would outrace the lugger's dragging to the shore.

The dragging won. There came a bump, and a welter of boiling seas tumbled over the bow. Then came another bump, a harder one, then a series of bumps and scrapings.

"Her sternpost's fast!" shouted Joe, making a funnel of his hands.

Then the deck listed steeply and the welter of seas walked round from the bow and came over the weather side.

"Swung beam-on!" called Joe; and I knew that my poor lugger was done.

And now, as though content now it had destroyed something, the wind went quickly round behind the land, and began to ease. In half an hour it had dropped to half its strength; in an hour it was nothing more than a sailing breeze, and the black clouds had broken up, dispersed, and the stars were shining. And the lagoon being shallow and of small extent, the sea went down with the passing of the wind, though we could still hear the deep-sea rollers thundering on the reef and the island's windward beach.

At low water next day we made the first of an examination which revealed that the lugger's sternpost was badly splintered, her keel split in a dozen places, and that various butts and timbers were sprung. With timber we cut on the island we patched her up as best we could, taking days to do what in a shipyard with its appliances and appointments would have

taken a few hours, and then carefully picking our weather we sailed her to one of the Queensland ports and had an estimate given for repairs.

It was the end of my career as a pearler. The cost of those repairs would have kept me in debt for months, years maybe, unless I found a wonderful pearl or extraordinarily rich shell-bed. And I knew enough of pearling to be aware that this time the odds against me were too great. I sold the lugger as she stood, and cleared out to the Solomon Islands.

CHAPTER 17

The Malaita Home-Comers

I HAD heard a lot about the Solomon Group. It had a most evil reputation. It was called the "Fighting Solomons," and the name was declared particularly appropriate. It was said that of all the groups there was none so warlike and quarrelsome as that long chain of high, volcanic islands bestraggling the chart to the south and east of New Guinea ; that nowhere did bitter little wars flourish with such great and deadly persistence, island against island, tribe against tribe ; that nowhere had a greater proportion of European lives been lost in the attempted settlement of a wild and savage land. Guadalcanar, largest of its islands, had never been crossed. No man had journeyed far into the mountainous interior of Malaita and returned. Poisoned arrows and man-traps were amongst the defences against invasion. It was the home of barbarity—red, raw, primeval barbarity.

Also of partly civilized barbarity, which was worse, the Solomons having been among the first of the groups to come in contact with people of more progressive lands. In the sixteenth century Mendana, the Spanish navigator, searching for the supposed Pacific continent, landed on its shores. Trilithons of enduring stone told of the advent of still earlier, but long-forgotten, voyagers. The presence in the languages of intoned

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words and accents suggested in a somewhat indefinite way one-time association with wayfarers from the Orient. The people, it was said, had absorbed the vices of these civilizing agents and but few of their virtues.

I didn't believe all these stories of barbarity and savagery. I had heard similar stories of the cannibals of the Gulf of Papua, and I had found those same cannibals rather good chaps in the main, possessed of any amount of gentleness and consideration for others, and essentially honest and sincere. I considered the inhabitants of the Solomons maligned at least in part. And I was mistaken. I was to learn that there were degrees of savagery, that the word was after all a relative term.

The time of my going to the group was when the enforcement of the White Australia Policy necessitated the returning to their homes of the Solomon Islanders —commonly called Kanakas—employed in the sugar-fields of Queensland—the Policy which was to tenant wholly with whites a country larger than the United States of America, and was therefore one of the greatest experiments in history.

We had two hundred of them on board, a motley crowd of both sexes and all ages—many were little children who spoke the mostly blasphemous pseudo-English of the sugar-fields with quaint facility—dressed in cheap finery and loaded with 20-pound caddies of

tobacco and boxes filled with flimsy cloth, bead necklaces, reels of imitation silk, coloured paper, and other rubbish on which they had squandered their savings in Chinese stores. Most had been many years in Queensland—some for more than half their lives—and regular work, regular food and regular hours had given them a muscular development they would never have attained had labour recruiters never induced them to leave the indolence of their island lives.

On many a Queensland plantation had I seen their like. Once for several months I overseered their sugar-cane cutting and hoeing and weeding, and never did I have a job I so disliked. They did not take kindly to this hard labouring in a foreign land. They seized every opportunity to loaf and come late and straggling to work. They malingered with amazing skill, and had ingenious codes whereby an overseer's approach was signalled. By means of cunningly semblanced accidents they broke and mislaid implements and tools and thus won further respite from the tyranny of toil. And on every possible occasion they drank to excess rank Hollands gin and the over-proof rum of the sugar-towns, whereupon they rioted savagely and in bodies attacked inoffensive whites and waylaid disliked overseers and made such a condition of affairs that no white woman dared walk alone.

But I did not believe them typical of the Solomon

Islander in his home. They could not be, I thought. These creatures were the result of transplantation from the careless ease of the islands to the strange conditions and hard-and-fast routine of a white man's land—examples of what sudden transition from the early palæolithic age to modernity could accomplish in the way of degradation. From barbarity they had descended to depravity.

Like many another Queensland white, I was glad when the edict of their deportation came. So were the majority of the Islanders themselves. They had had enough of hard and regular work and of the hostility they themselves had engendered in the whites, and there was rejoicing in the compounds and much discussion of the pleasant idleness that awaited them in their island homes. I heard them talking of buying pieces of garden land and wives to work them, and of building houses with doors and windows and verandahs all round, like white men's houses, and living down the years in ease and comfort. Wherefore they spent their wages-savings in trade—goods they thought would be acceptable to the people of their respective villages, who, dazzled by the number and utility of the things, would be ready to do anything for the wealthy home-comers.

Many bought rifles, shot-guns and ammunition. Firearms were extremely desirable in the Solomons. In Ysabel and other comparatively settled islands they

were items of trade which commanded ready exchange. A rifle was a much more satisfactory hunting weapon than a spear. For a Snider and a handful of cartridges could be obtained things that could be obtained for nothing else. In wild islands like Malaita, where the social order was mainly a matter of kill or be killed, firearms gave a security otherwise unattainable.

But the Island Government had issued a stern ukase against native importation of firearms. Rifles obtained for food-hunting purposes were in the habit of being traded to wilder tribes and used for man-hunting. The Government was out to put down man-hunting, and the natives had more than sufficient rifles already.

Wherefore the monotony of my first journey to the Solomons was relieved by the frequent searching of the two hundred home-goers. All the whites on board took part ; we didn't trust the natives in the crew to do any of the searching.

The Islanders devised all manner and places of concealment. Any roll of cloth was liable to contain a short-barrelled Martini-Henry in its centre. Umbrellas hid dismantled shot-guns in their folds. A woman who walked with a certain queer stiffness was found to have a Snider rifle strapped to her leg beneath her dress. A man carried an antiquated revolver slung under his armpit, beneath his shirt, and in a pair of boots he never wore were cardboard boxes of

cartridges to fit it. In hollowed interiors of caddies of tobacco we found modern .303 ammunition, and powder flasks and bags of bullets for old-fashioned muzzle-loaders. In the limber of the forepeak and in spare cable in the chain locker were half a dozen new Winchesters, and jambed in about the cargo of the hold we found some more.

The passengers made a fuss. Some professed Christians returning to Ysabel, where there was nothing to fear, demanded their guns back on the ground that they were theirs by right of open purchase and that it was contrary to their understanding of white man justice to deprive others of their lawful property. One called the captain foul names to his face, names that reflected on his parentage, made to attack him, and was put in irons for the rest of the voyage. Another was caught prising a board off the store-room where the weapons were kept, and he was put in irons too.

The Malaita folk individually and collectively begged to be allowed the weapons back. There were twenty of them, five of them women. They were afraid to go ashore at their villages without guns, they declared with terrible earnestness. They had been so long away that they would be regarded almost as strangers. In the more settled places that would not matter much, but on Malaita all kinds of terrible things happened to unarmed strangers—especially

unarmed strangers possessed of quantities of trade-goods. They would be killed almost to a certainty, they said.

They tried to bribe us, swearing obscenely they would not inform against us. One man offered the contents of his trade-box for the return of his Snider ; another a much-prized bottle of rum and twelve shillings and threepence in small coins. A young woman offered herself. And when we refused, the beseeching went from their eyes and they looked at us sullenly, resentfully, and took to muttering of the revolt they would like to dare.

" I don't give twopence about the others, but I'd like to let these Malaitas have their guns," said the captain. " But it's more than my job is worth, besides meaning a thumping fine."

And so, with two hundred resentful and sullen passengers, we chugged away to the north and east and picked up the ranges of Guadalcanar and came finally to Makambo, port-of-entry for the British Solomons ; and here the discovered weapons were delivered to the Authorities, who searched the passengers once more and then transhipped them to smaller vessels for passage to their respective villages.

" Twenty for Malaita, eh ? " said one of the white residents with whom I chatted. " The others might be all right—if they're careful. But Malaita ! Things are lively there. They always are. They're

devils on Malaita. I remember——" and he told such a tale of internecine strife and individual murder that I accused him of exaggerating in order to impress me as a new arrival, a favourite sport in the Islands.

"You'll see when you've been here a while," he grinned. "You might be accustomed to New Guinea natives and all that, but the Solomons are different. You'll see."

I had my first glimpse of the difference as overseer of a hundred Malaita and Santa Anna boys on a coconut-plantation on Ysabel Island, a position I obtained a few days after my arrival at Makambo. They were an ugly crew, black-skinned, woolly-headed, thick-lipped and repellant of face. Their habits were bestial and beyond a certain low cunning they seemed remarkably unintelligent. They were sullen of demeanour and unmirthful. And they appeared devoid of gratitude. In my inexperience I started by being kind to them, gave them little presents, and tried to garner something of an insight into their aspect to life. They promptly translated my sympathy into weakness of character, disobeyed my commands and played up generally.

"No good playing around with them like that," said the planter. "Treat them as muck. Remember that a white man's the only human being and that there isn't any other kind. That's the only way to

get anything out of them. I've been twenty years in the group, and I reckon I know."

He was of the man-driving type who screwed the last ounce out of the labour and knocked them about on the least provocation ; and if there was no provocation he knocked them about just the same. Their hours of daily labour were thirteen, which meant that I had to do thirteen hours', too. A big, bull-necked man, immensely strong, he forced his will on those primordial savages by muscular power, though he always went armed and kept a loaded Winchester, slung to the side of his bed. He used his fists. The labour knew them as punishing fists. They were always punishing somebody, and if the somebody tried to strike back he received a bullet in his leg, if he wasn't strapped to a palm-tree in the home compound and whipped, or shipped to Makambo and imprisoned for insubordination.

" The only principle they recognize is the principle of physical force," said the planter. " Especially the Malaitas. They're the most bloodthirsty niggers on the face of the earth, head-hunters and cannibals to a man. They'd have a shot at getting all our heads, only that they're on a strange island and have no getaway."

And I thought of the fifteen men and five women who had been so long in Queensland that they feared they would be regarded in their own terrible Malaita

as strangers. I wondered anxiously how they were faring. I was soon to know.

The plantation labour was continually deserting. They had no stomach for completing the three years of service for which they had "signed-on." During my first week there were three cases of men stealing canoes from the local village and setting sail. Each time they were brought back promptly by Ysabel natives who, seeking favour with the planter and hoping for reward, had gone in pursuit. Early in the second week another was missing, also a canoe; but he wasn't brought back and two days later a schooner dropped in to the anchorage and reported seeing a crowd of sharks about a smashed canoe on a shore reef ten miles down the coast.

Then one morning one of the plantation's two cutters was missing from the anchorage, and a tally of the labour showed two Malaita men short. A council of action resulted in my taking the other cutter and a crew of Gavutu boys, who well knew the way, and going in pursuit, while the planter and a second overseer remained and kept the rest of the labour in hand.

I caught those runaways. I caught them half-way up the Malaita coast, and the reason of my catching them was that they had no headsail, the planter having been in the habit of keeping it ashore in his house as something in the way of insuring against the theft

of the cutter from the anchorage. Without the headsail the deserters lost ground and made leeway, and they calmly gave it up as hopeless when I ran alongside and forced them aboard my craft. But it was not the pursuit and capture of those runaways that sticks in my memory as the outstanding feature of my first trip to Malaita.

It was something I saw one night during the way back. The wind was light, and the tide had taken us nearer the shore than we had been so far, when suddenly there arose a loud beating of tom-toms and the blowing of conches, mingled with a hoarse shouting and yelling—a dreadful, throaty yelling. Presently we came abreast a village lit by flaring fires which outlined the palm-tops and gave a yellow sheen to the thatch of the houses. Through a binocular I had glimpses of naked, painted men and women dancing wildly.

"No good go close-to," advised my leading hand. "Better we luff-up and keep out to sea. Them feller make bad play."

It was exceedingly "bad play." It was the aftermath of the robbing and killing and eating of the twenty Malaita sugar-workers who had so justly feared their unarmed home-coming. Later a gunboat found their sun- and smoke-dried heads hanging in the canoe-houses.

CHAPTER 18

Trading in Humans

AFTER a spell of overseering, followed by three months as assistant to a copra-trader, I obtained a small schooner and set up in business as a labour recruiter. There was a steady and continuous demand for labour throughout the group, and recruiting was profitable if the recruiter had any luck. The coconut- and rubber-planters were prepared to pay as much as £10 each for natives willing to serve a two-years' term. My vessel was licensed to carry forty-eight—at the rate of two for each of her measurement tons—and more than once I delivered a full complement as the result of a six weeks' trip.

And often I obtained none at all. Recruiting was even more uncertain than pearling. Of all the commodities in which I had dealt at various times none was so uncertain as this commodity of human beings. Amongst other things to be reckoned with was cunning dishonesty. The natives had little idea of keeping their word if they could avoid it.

At one place I spent hours depicting the abundance and quality of the food, and the easiness of the work and the splendid housing of a certain plantation, without a single recruit offering himself, though the village was filled with suitable men and was well known as a good recruiting place. Then, when I

was about to give up, six young men announced they would come if I paid their parents a recruiting "present" of six fathoms of cloth, a sheath-knife and two pounds of tobacco apiece. A more experienced recruiter would have seen something suspicious in this sudden willingness; as it was I paid the things over and told the young men to be on board before sundown. And that was the last I saw of them, for they and their parents cleared into the adjoining bush, and the chiefs blandly declared they could not help me in the matter of searching for them. I sailed away without a single recruit and minus trade-goods to the value of several pounds.

It was also a hazardous business. Besides the usual risks of the sea, there was danger of mutiny among the recruits, attack from war-canoes, and the possibility of touching at villages where there were "heads owing."

This last meant that a villager had died while away from his village, or been killed in a raid, and that his friends and relatives were seeking the head of the first stranger who came along. They called it "making square." A pleasing custom! At one time there were as many as twenty-five heads owing on Malaita at once—which made that terrible island a desirable place from which to keep away till the "making square" was finished.

White heads were always in demand, and at one

place an attempt was made to get mine. A while previous to my visit one of the villagers had died from dysentery while one of a trading vessel's crew, and there was therefore a head owing—a white head for preference, as the man had died in a white man's employ. I didn't know anything about it and in all innocence dropped anchor in the tiny harbour and went ashore.

But I didn't go ashore in the free and confident manner in which I should have gone ashore in, say, the Gulf of Papua. We didn't do things like that in the Solomons. Precautions were necessary all the time. My dinghy was followed by another, which lay afloat just off the beach, with the rowers well armed and keeping the oars in the water in case I should have to run for it. It was called a " covering boat."

The village was an irregular collection of high-fronted buildings strung along the high-water mark, some in groups of three or four, others standing by themselves. The most conspicuous was a canoe-house, a long, low building with the ridge-pole so sagged towards the centre that it looked like a hollow-backed horse. Peeping from the entrance was the high, curving prow of a war-canoe fit to carry fifty men or more. I didn't like the look of that canoe-house; it bore a too close resemblance to the " dubus," or cannibal temples, of Western New Guinea ; and

I knew it housed things other than canoes—queer, gruesome things, such as the smoke-cured heads of men, and mummified hands, and human vertebræ threaded into dreadful necklaces. I landed at the point of the beach furthest from it.

The villagers seemed friendly enough, coming to meet me and offering to shake hands. Oh yes, there were young men willing to work on the coconut-plantations of the white men, they said when I stated my business. Plenty of them. Would I come along to the canoe-house and talk the matter over ?

I wouldn't. I wasn't going near that canoe-house. I wasn't going too far from the covering boat. The matter could be discussed right here on the beach just as well as anywhere else, I told them. So, their protests notwithstanding, we talked where we were, going into details of the wages the young men would receive, and the conditions of their indenture generally. Everything seemed to be going smoothly, and I reckoned on collecting a score of recruits.

And then a warning cry came from the covering boat ; and I glanced up to see half behind the bole of a coconut-palm a man in the act of drawing a bow. It was a big, powerful bow, taller than himself, and the arrow was pointed straight at me.

I raised my rifle, fired blindly—at the archer, the crowd, anywhere—and leapt for the water. The crowd waded after me, shouting and yelling ; and as

I turned to fire again, the archer let fly. The arrow —a thin, hard-pointed reed heavily barbed—struck me in the neck, just under the jaw, making only a superficial wound, but leaving a mark I shall always bear. With the crew-boys firing and holding back the mob, I clambered into the dinghy and returned to the schooner ; and a few minutes later sail was hoisted and we standing well away to sea. I never returned to that village ; it was no place for a mild-mannered young man intent on making a living by peaceful means.

In this part of the group I came to know one of the bravest men I have ever met. He was a missionary, a thin, gaunt man, old before his time, with sunken eyes and skin much yellowed by constantly recurring fevers. His station was close to a village in which every man had at some time or other taken human life, and was still taking it. Only very infrequently did he visit Makambo or other places where white men gathered ; and each time he left for his lonely station it was predicted he would never return. He died a year or two ago from fever—the fourth in succession to give his life in the attempted establishment of a mission in that savage spot, *and the only one of the four to die in a bed.* The others had been killed and eaten and their smoke-dried heads hung in the canoe-houses. I raise my hat to the memory of his great courage.

To get the recruits on board was one thing ; to get them safely signed on to the employer was another. Sometimes they would regret leaving their homes and insist on being taken back. At one village in the eastern part of the group I secured twenty hefty young men and in due course set sail for the nearest Deputy-Commissioner's to sign them on. At the start they seemed happy enough and spoke much of what they would buy with their wages when their period of service expired.

But when their village was lost to sight they regretted having come. They became village-sick. They spent their time wailing that never again would they see their village and their people. They were fools to think of going so far away from home, they said. They begged me to put the schooner about and return.

On my refusing, they sulked, and I could see there was likelihood of trouble when they came before the Deputy. If they refused to sign on, I had no power to compel them ; the natives were at all times perfectly free to choose whether they would indenture or no. Indeed, I would have to take them back at my own expense, and would probably be rebuked by the Deputy for taking natives away from their villages against their will.

I was worried ; but I didn't let them see it ; and I sailed on serenely, hoping that by the time we arrived

they would be recovered from the village-sickness.

On the second night, however, I awoke to a disturbance on the deck above my head. Running up, revolver in hand, I found the vessel up in the wind, the sails banging wildly, and a number of the recruits struggling with the steersman. They were endeavouring to obtain possession of the schooner and sail her back to their village.

At the point of the revolver I drove them for'rd ; and when the schooner was on her course again, I talked to them.

They had done a very serious thing, I said, with all the sternness I could command. They had attempted mutiny on the high seas. The Government would be angry when it heard. Very angry indeed. Each of them would get years in the gaol-house at Makambo. Ten years perhaps. Maybe they would be whipped besides. Anyway they would have to work all that time for nothing, and work very hard too. Many of their friends and relatives would be dead when they returned to their village. Ten years was a long time.

I said a lot more to the same effect and then left them under an armed guard of crew-boys.

Next morning as I sat at breakfast on top of the cabin-house, their leaders came aft and said they were very sorry for what they had done. They had had no idea of the seriousness of their offence, they declared.

They hadn't stopped to think. It was only that their hearts were sore for their village. That was all. They hadn't wanted to steal the schooner, or anything ; and they hadn't intended to hurt anybody. They didn't want to go to the gaol-house. It would be too terrible altogether. Would I please forgive them ? They would be good in future.

Expecting something of the sort, I had a reply ready. I said I was not a hard-minded man—like the Government men, for instance, who were always so ready to put people in the gaol-houses. I was a generously-minded man. I had a forgiving nature. I would forgive them and say nothing about the attempted mutiny—provided they signed on before the Deputy without any fuss for two years on the plantations, as they had agreed when I recruited them. If they did that, I would consider the incident closed.

They agreed willingly, and there was no more trouble.

When sailing the coasts of certain of the islands a sharp look-out had to be kept for war-canoes. The natives had canoe-navies. A sharp distinction was made between the canoes of everyday use and fighting craft. Fishing canoes were usually single-log affairs with or without outriggers, according to the usage of the particular island. Trading canoes, having to endure long open-sea journeys, were larger and were constructed to carry large quantities of goods.

The fighting craft were very different. Instead of being made from hollowed logs, they were built up of split and carefully adzed planks, with the seams and joints made watertight with vegetable putty. The bows and sterns were built high and curving and freely decorated with carvings and inlaid pearlshell. On either side of the bow, just above the water-line, were crude paintings or carvings of the human eyes—so that the canoes would see which way to go, the natives said.

One sundown the cry went up from my crew that a fleet of war-canoes was coming. They were a mile or so away, slipping along in the shallows of the shore, the paddlers standing upright to their work, and dipping their blades in perfect time. The warriors, be-feathered and painted, sat in the body of the craft. Like shadows themselves, the canoes sneaked through the darkening water, two abreast, ominous, sinister, relentless.

I headed the schooner seaward with all speed. But the canoes were not after us. They kept straight on along the shore, and presently disappeared behind a long point of land.

Some days later I was hailed by a patrolling gun-boat, and on going aboard I learnt that the canoes had raided a neighbouring village—a surprise attack in which a number of the villagers were killed and their heads taken. The gun-boat was on the way to

restore some measure of peace and offer protection to the survivors of the raided village. The captain warned me to keep away from that part of the coast till things had quietened down somewhat. I thanked him, remarked that wild elephants wouldn't have dragged me there after seeing those canoes, wished him luck and returned to my schooner.

He didn't find his task an easy one. I heard the whole story of it later. The raided villagers didn't want peace and protection. They wanted only to be left alone. They didn't want any pesky gun-boat poking round and interfering.

For they had determined to be avenged. Scouts had been sent to neighbouring allied villages, and all over the coastal hillside conches were calling the warriors to the fray. The raiders were to be raided and slaughtered even as they had raided and slaughtered. The whole of that part of the coast was in a fury of martial fervour.

The gun-boat captain was puzzled to know what to do. He couldn't hang round there indefinitely, and the moment he went away there would be another outburst of murdering and head-taking. At last he conceived a bright idea.

With a strong force of his own men he went to the allied villages and told the people they had half-an-hour to clear out. Then he burnt the houses to the ground. It was drastic, but effective. The re-

building of the villages—which from the point of view of cleanliness had badly needed destroying anyway—gave the people something other than war to think about. And when the houses were again erected, desire to assist the raided village was diminished to zero. A few weeks of plain, everyday work had weakened the bonds of alliance. That gun-boat captain had a deep and wise understanding of native psychology.

CHAPTER 19

Bamuta Jimmy Rescues His Wife

IT was no easy matter to get behind the mind of a Solomon Island native. His angle of vision differed acutely from ours, and the angle was made still more acute by his pseudo-acquaintance with civilization. His brain reacted to impulses foreign to European understanding. Take the case of my bo'sun, Bamuta Jimmy, and his wife.

She was a young and more-or-less handsome girl from a village near Gavutu, and Jimmy bought her with the savings of a year. I was at the buying, marriage, or whatever it was. It was a very simple affair. At the feet of the girl's father—an ugly old scoundrel squatted beneath the palms before his house—Jimmy heaped a collection of goods he had bought at one of the shore stores. They ranged from a packet of sewing needles to an ancient gramophone with a single record, much cracked and worn. The father counted them one by one, compared their number with a line of knots on a piece of string, indicated that they were the things agreed upon, tried to wheedle an additional article or two ; then on the bridegroom emphatically refusing to be bled any further, he nodded reluctantly, and Jimmy took his wife on board the schooner. The old father-in-law started the gramophone at once and, I think, kept it

going all night ; at any rate, when we hoisted sail at daylight and stood for the harbour's mouth the alleged music of the cracked record still came discordantly across the water.

Jimmy valued his wife highly, and I thought it was a case of deep and abiding love. My mistake was revealed when, after a struggle with a heavy surf, he rescued her from probable drowning.

I had put the schooner into the mouth of a small river for careening, and the weather holding promise of remaining fine, Mrs. Bamuta Jimmy borrowed a canoe from the village near by and went out beyond the breakers of the beach to fish.

Suddenly a heavy nor'-west squall—what the natives called an " angry wind "—swept up, bringing in its train a lumpy following sea which transformed the small breakers into a mighty tumbling surf.

When the squall died we saw that the canoe had survived, but that the girl had lost her paddle and was drifting helplessly in a dangerous position outside the outer line of the surf.

The villagers looked at the white boiling of the seas and shook their heads. It was no use thinking of going to the rescue, they said. No canoe could get out through that surf.

But Bamuta Jimmy thought otherwise, and procuring a small canoe he launched it, jumped in when opportunity offered, seized the paddle and with a few well-

timed strokes slipped past the first line of surf.

It was well done and revealed Jimmy as an experienced canoe-man ; but making further progress was much more difficult. For a long time his efforts were directed to keeping in the ever-shifting strip of unbroken water between the first and second lines. He went ahead or astern as occasion demanded, acting with that quick certainty which comes of long practice, his every muscle quiveringly alert, his eyes ever on the wall of water tumbling just in front of him.

Once it seemed he had misjudged. A giant wave, greater than all the rest, swept up majestically, a threat of certain destruction, and for one long dreadful moment towered high above the frail thing of adzed planks that contained a man. Then its steep side sank inward a little, a ribbon of white appeared along its top, to widen with monstrous quickness, and the wave came crashing down with a roar like the bellow of a volcano.

We held our breaths ; but the canoe bobbed up serenely. Jimmy had moved back just the requisite distance to avoid the crash. He now rushed forward with all speed, for the big wave had caused in the succession of the seas the momentary pause for which he had been waiting. In a few moments he was clear of the surf, had reached the girl, taken her on board his own canoe and was returning through the surf—a simple matter compared with going out.

The villagers and the schooner's crew acclaimed his skill when he stepped ashore. He was a great canoeman, they declared, and a brave one. Not many men would have dared a sea like that merely for the sake of a woman, they said.

Jimmy took no notice of them. He gave all his attention to his wife. He shouted at her and cursed. He called her all manner of disrespectful names. Had she not run away he would have given her the beating of her life there and then.

"Woman too much one big fool!" he said to me angrily. "If she been drown' I lose that big price I been pay for her, and I no get nothin'—no wife no things. For that father belong her wouldn't give back to me that grammyphone and all them things. No fear! He too much greedy feller!"

Bamuta Jimmy's wife represented a cash investment, and his courage was inspired by mercenary considerations!

They regarded physical prowess as a tremendously desirable accomplishment, and readily imitated most white man sports and games, particularly boxing. But the whites discouraged their boxing as something liable to injure the prestige which allowed a handful of Europeans to dwell with any degree of safety at all among thousands of natives. Once the latter believed they were superior to the white man at his own accomplishments they threatened to become unmanageable.

At Makambo there was a burly native who, because of success in several bouts, considered himself the superior of any white at fisticuffs, and was therefore a most offensive person. The situation was explained to an ex-champion pugilist doing a steamer-tour of the Islands, and a bout was arranged.

Because the white tapped lightly and allowed his heavy blows to miss, the native thought he was winning—though he was plainly puzzled by the circumstance that blows he intended as knock-outs were mysteriously wasted on the air. The woolly-headed onlookers cheered wildly and shouted that their countryman was the greatest boxer in the world.

At last, tiring of the farce, the white man drove in a succession of stiff body-blows. That ended it. The native dropped his hands, opened his mouth in astonishment, vented a yell of mingled terror and amazement, and tore out of the ring. And his fickle countrymen streamed after him shouting mockery and abuse. As a fallen idol he became a most subdued person and never swanked about his skill as a boxer any more.

Sometimes the upholding of the prestige called for great ingenuity. When the Jack Johnson–Tommy Burns championship fight took place, we tried to keep the illustrated newspapers, when they arrived, away from native eyes. But one escaped us, and the news

spread rapidly that a black man had triumphed over a white. Our prestige began to rock !

Then a planter conceived a bright idea. Summoning some of the influential chiefs he told them that the series of pictures was incomplete. The black had not won, he said. Big and all as he was he had been beaten by the little white. Though the pictures showed the white lying on the floor of the ring, it was merely a ruse.

Burns, he declared, was merely awaiting his opportunity, and later had sprung up and knocked out his opponent.

He went into much circumstantial detail ; and presently the chiefs returned to their people with the news that no matter how big and strong a black man was he could not triumph over the strength and cunning of a white. I don't know what happened when they eventually learned the truth, for soon after I left that part of the Solomons and never went back. But I suppose the planter evolved another successful plan.

Like the New Guineans and Torres Islanders, the Solomon folk were filled with superstition and belief in the power of sorcery. Every sundown in many places the approaches to the villages were beaten with boughs to frighten off evil spirits—night being notoriously the time when spirits " walked about." There were places to which no Islander would willingly

go. One was the "Ghost Islands," a dozen or so high rocks in the centre of a beautiful, smooth-water lagoon. Here the spirits were alleged to do their fishing, these particular spirits being possessed of bodily needs and desires. They reserved the islands specially for themselves, and the native who poached was liable to a mysterious and sudden end. When I visited the islands to photograph them, I had to row the dinghy from the schooner myself, for no member of the crew would approach nearer than the anchorage.

But they were not afraid of alcoholic spirits. They would do almost anything for liquor, and I had always to keep my private supply locked securely away. They would drink anything with a "bite" in it. Calling at a small island north of Vella Lavella, I found the whole population, men, women, and children even, recovering from a protracted spree, with many looking sick and sorry for themselves. I was puzzled to know where they had found the liquor, for there was no resident trader, no vessel had called recently, and the villagers had no craft in which to go to Vella Lavella or elsewhere where supplies might be obtained.

Presently I learned the truth. A European naturalist collecting reptilia on the island had gone in his cutter for supplies of stores, leaving two casks of specimens behind. Temptation proved too great for the villagers. They tapped the casks and drank the

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methylated spirit in which the snakes and things were preserved !

There was a Government edict against the supplying of natives with liquor. While all objected to the restriction, the more civilized ones thought it unfair. White men, Chinese and others were allowed free access to liquor, they said—why not the natives ? Did not the missionaries say that in God's sight all men were equal ? Well, were they not in God's sight ? Were they not men ? Full-grown men ? Why, then, this discrimination ?

They would resort to all manner of devices to obtain liquor. They would plead sickness and ask for grog to ease the pain. One old man came hobbling to me with a most distressing story of " bone-ache " (rheumatism). Another declared he had a " sore throat in stomach "—whatever that might have been. Both declared they were certain to die forthwith unless they had three fingers of gin. Both recovered with marvellous suddenness when I suggested the compulsory administering of castor-oil instead.

Here is a letter I received from one who had spent his youth in a mission station :

" I, Old Man Charlie, write this letter to tell you that Crismus soon come now next week and we people of this village want make big dance and play and going to have canoe races and make big pudden and every-

thing and do like white man when Crismus comes. Can you send to me some paint for to put on our faces for to make us look funny and make the people laugh? And some old trousis and coat for me to dress up inside and play Father Crismus, and some old-woman dress for my fat wife to play Mother Crismus too? That all. Only one thing—you not speak anybody about this—but I think all right you roll up two bottles squareface (Hollands gin) inside them old trousis and coat. Nobody going look for squareface inside old trousis and coat. Nobody savee, only you and me. Might be I pay you some time when you come this village. I like very much have two bottle squareface, because when Crismus come I want feel plenty good will to all men, like I read in the Bible. That all."

He never forgave me for disregarding this artful appeal.

Through having been to a mission-school, Old Man Charlie had a much better command of the English language than most natives. Usually native expression in English was a most roundabout business.

To write was to "make marks longa paper." Blotting-paper was "towel belong letter."

Fear was "Heart belong me walk about longa my mouth," and anger "Blood belong me hot all same

fire." Hunger was " Stomach no got nothing inside, poor feller."

Enquiry as to the distance of a place brought replies like these, as the case may be :

" Close-to " ; " little bit long way " ; " plenty long way too much."

Yet they were often more logical in reply than we are. Thus : " Did you find it ? "

" No ; Boss."

" Oh, you didn't find it ? "

" *Yes.*"

Which, of course, is quite correct.

Very few whites spoke the native tongue ; so many and varied were the dialects that a life's study was needed for their mastery. Bêche-de-mer English was the universal tongue. It was used in the Courts. A Deputy Commissioner—Magistrate, Chief Gaoler, Registrar, Shipping Master, Labour Officer, and a dozen other things all in one—wearing usually only a shirt and khaki trousers cut off at the knees, sat at a table in his thatched courthouse and shot at witnesses questions like these :

" You been look hand belong that one feller prisoner hammer that other feller longa club ? "

" Your eye been look strong feller ? " (Are you certain you *saw* him ?), and sentenced prisoners to " sit down longa gaol house for six feller moons and do plenty hard work too much."

So common was this curious tongue that in what was then the German Solomons, but is now British, the Germans had to learn it in order to converse with the natives. It amused Britishers to hear them struggling with it—the only English they knew. It was impossible, apparently, to invent a Bêche-de-mer German.

Despite the barbarity, treachery and cunning of the natives, I think the greatest danger in the Solomons was from disease.

In this respect it was the worst of all the groups. The chief afflictions were malarial fever and yaws—bone-eating ulcers from which few whites were immune. The least scratch was liable to set up a persistent yaw which utterly defied raw carbolic and other heroic remedies. For a month I was unable to leave my cabin without assistance because of a devastating and exceedingly painful yaw on the chin. It started from a knock so slight as barely to break the skin.

When the tiny *Snark* was in the group, her famous American owner and master, the late Jack London, was badly stricken with them. The opinion of residents was that they set up the weird and unknown disease which eventually caused the world-tour of the *Snark* to be abandoned.

When I first saw him he was sitting beneath an awning on the vessel's after-deck, and able to move

only with difficulty. His hands, feet and shins were attacked, and he was obviously in great distress. But the virile spirit of the man was superior to his bodily afflictions, and it was with a smile of good-fellowship that he motioned me to a seat and ordered drinks to be brought. His was one of those invigorating personalities which inspire others with desire to "do things." I know that when I left him I was filled with a determination to give my best to life. It seems to me that Jack London's chief personal characteristic was his effortless ability to arouse in whomsoever he conversed with all that was virile and best.

As in the case of yaws, nearly every white contracted malaria, and I garnered my full share. I suffered it ashore and afloat, in season and out of season, and in time came to wondering what was wrong if a week went by without an attack. It was this more than any one thing that finally drove me from the group. I realized that all the adventure and prospects of financial prosperity in the world would not compensate for loss of health.

Ill-health, adventure, humour, tragedy—all were part of the day's work in the Solomons ; and sometimes the tragedy was the tragedy of the mind alone. To Makambo there came at times one whose life was a perpetually tragic conflict. She was a Samoan lady, widow of a European, and wealthy. By courtesy she was called a Queen. Her plantations covered thou-

sands of acres, and she was sole owner of several large and fertile islands. She had a fleet of pearling vessels. In her employ were white men—managers, clerks, overseers of labour. For visiting her outlying plantations and for pleasure, she had a private yacht. It was a most beautiful vessel, luxuriously appointed, and fitted with the latest appliances of maritime science. There was even a French chef, brought specially from Paris.

But at heart the Queen was still a native. Island customs, traditions and superstitions were dearer to her than all the adjuncts of advanced civilization. There were times when she cast aside her dignity and joined in the wild dances of her natives, when she gave herself to the abandon of one who all her life had known only a barbarous freedom. Her existence was one continual struggle between presenting an appearance in keeping with her wealth and position and the pull of age-old hereditary influences. She was a paradox. Of all the tragedies I have known I think hers the greatest.

CHAPTER 20

The Civilized Wild

AND after many days and wanderings I came to the Civilized Wild, which is Fiji. I was no longer seeking adventure or a job. For some peculiar reason of their own editors no longer regretfully declined my stories, but bought them with commendable avidity ; and I had been encouraged to the manufacturing of numbers of longer manuscripts for which certain publishers paid me real money and made into books. My odyssey was over. I went to Fiji as a tourist, a man of leisure, intent on comparing the Civilized Wild with the Palæolothic Wild of my roamings.

Insofar as Fiji was a beautiful group of islands, mountainous, exceedingly fertile and dripping with indigenous vegetation, it was similar to the lands to which I had been so long accustomed. But instead of lying in its own virginal state, much of the land had been made into sugar-fields and banana-plantations prodigal in their fructivity. There was much modernity and progress. Suva, the capital, was a fair-sized town with ashphalted roads, a telephone service, taxis, sewerage, shops with plate-glass windows and even the funny little boxes that take your money along a wire to the cashier and bring back the change, hotels where people solemnly dressed for dinner, a sports ground,

racecourse, a daily newspaper and several periodicals, also churches of denominations to suit all tastes, a Government House with Governor, aides and staff complete, a botanical gardens, a Carnegie library, and a most imposing gaol.

It was a city in miniature, yet still an island town. The flaming hibiscus was there in great profusion, and coconut-palms, and papyia trees that loaded the air with the sweet scent of their blossoms, and mangoe trees a blaze of green and darkened gold, and the usual coral reef which made the usual shelter for shipping. And many of the people walking the streets were woolly-headed, brown-skinned, and barefooted, and there were shops where kava, Fiji's national drink, was sold in coconut-shells for cups, and the spaces before most of the houses in the native quarter were used mainly for the airing of great, close-woven sleeping-mats.

And as its modernity and progress was different from the island towns I had so far seen, so were the natives different. Fiji was once a land of cannibals. It has a record of murder and wholesale slaying hardly equalled by any other of the groups. But all that was long ago. I found the Fijians most peaceful persons, totally divorced from their nefarious practices of the past, great believers in Christianity and much given to imitating European ways of thought and manners.

SUVA, CAPITAL OF FIJI

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They were exceedingly dignified. Indeed, they were too dignified to work for others if they could avoid it, or even for themselves. The British Government had confirmed the titular ownership of land to those who held it by the hereditary right, and such owners lived on their rents and sales. Those compelled to work as a last resort chiefly engaged as house-servants or sought employment in the public service, often in the Police force. A policeman's lot was a desired one, it carrying a certain prestige. A Fijian policeman was no mean person in his own right. He swaggered to his heart's content and lorded it over anyone he thought he *could* lord it over. I don't think I have seen anywhere such languid superiority as that of the Fijian policemen who directed the cross-street traffic. They were bosses of the roost and knew it. Nor have I seen anything so incongruous as these bareheaded, barefooted sons of a cannibal race, dressed in khaki jackets and loin-cloths with scalloped edges, indolently waving the right-of-way to a stream of modern motors.

Labouring on the sugar- and banana-plantations, and other hard toil, they left mostly to Indians, whom the planters had imported in thousands. The Indians were of an exceedingly low type, garnered from the slums of Bombay and Madras, thin-limbed and puny, but of sharper mentality than the Fijians. In the matter of a deal the Indians "put it all over" the

natives, who despising the nimble-witted foreigner, considered it beneath their dignity to haggle with them. It was a curious social phenomenon, this filling with one coloured race a land owned by another coloured race. There was no merging. If there were any instances of Fijian and Indian intermarrying I never heard of them. The races kept apart and maintained their own characteristics. The male Indians wore no other dress than their national "dhoti," the females their long dresses and head-shawls and forehead and nose and ear ornaments of golden coins, and toe-rings and anklets and bracelets made from beaten silver. The Fijian males wore loin-cloths and singlets, or shirts ; the women dresses in imitation of the dresses of white women.

And their villages were different from those of the wild islands, being surprisingly small, some containing less than two hundred people, and the thatched houses sitting low to the ground, instead of on high piles, and being dotted about here and there without any attempt at the formation of streets.

And in their social system was little or nothing of the communism of the Papuans and Kanakas, and no plurality of wives. Also, chieftainship was hereditary, and a chief a most highly respected person who was treated with all due ceremony, which was certainly not the case in Papua, where the sorcerer was the all-powerful person. The common or garden variety of

FIJIAN CANOE

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native always knelt before a chief and walked backwards from his presence. At Bua, a small island near the mouth of the Rewa, Fiji's largest river, I saw a chief living in state regal by comparison with the state of his " subjects." Though his palace was a thatched one and he was attired in a hip-cloth, he had any number of obsequious servants and even a European cook, and his stupidest wish was law. He had the imprimatur of the Government, who made him an annual allowance which helped him to play the heavy in this manner. He was a direct descendant of one of the original and most savage rulers of Fiji.

But despite their superiority, dignity and civilized ways, the Fijians retained many of their old beliefs and superstitions. In a Suva back street there was a large banyan tree which no native would willingly go near after dark. It was said that the spirit-bodies of still-born children hung from the branches by their feet, like bats, and that at night they became phosphorescently visible, which was certainly a sight to be avoided. One native explained to me that there were only a certain number of lives in the world and that a child born without life was a case of a body too many, wherefore the pre-natal spirit hid in the banyan tree, not knowing what to do with itself. There was, it appeared, a sharp distinction between pre- and post-natal life.

At Uluvata, a salt-water village, the people were

forbidden to whistle in the vicinity of the houses, as whistling was said to attract mosquitoes. On the shore reef near by was a large block of fossilized coral which was alleged to be the shrine of the Mosquito God, and plantains and sweet-potatoes and other propitiatory offerings were regularly laid there.

They had many such superstitions, and further, they were possessed to the full of that sensitiveness to shame I had seen so often in Papua and other places. The last outstanding feature of my visit to Fiji was a personal experience of it.

Accompanied by a planter friend who knew the local language, I was journeying about the upper reaches of the Rewa River, some two days' journey from the coast, and everywhere the people exhibited the kindness and courtesy of their race. But at a village called Siria the people, responding to the planter's extremely exaggerated account of my importance, set out to make themselves extra-pleasant. In the house of the biggest chief they held a kind of reception. Kava roots were ground and the liquor made and consumed in large quantities. Girls inadequately attired specially for the occasion came to me to have their breasts rubbed with oil ; and afterwards they danced and sang and placed about my head and shoulders garlands made from the beaten inner bark of the hibiscus plant. In accordance with age-old custom, men and women squatted before me on the

mats of the floor and made highly complimentary comments on my appearance and attire, the chief out-doing the others in these remarks.

For a time all went well ; then one man stated that he liked my trousers. He was enamoured of my trousers. They were the best trousers he had ever seen, he said ; and he asked the planter if he thought the great Turaga (Master) beside him would give away the garment if he were asked.

There was a sudden hush at this, for it was a recognized custom among these natives that when a thing was asked for, or even extravagantly admired, it should be handed over. Seeing that the people had been so kind, I would willingly have given the man the garment ; but I was travelling light and my only other trousers were sopping wet from a long day's journey in the rain.

I had this explained to the chief. He undertook to relieve me of the necessity of either wearing wet clothes or being considered mean. He was an elderly man who prided himself on his knowledge of white men and their countries. He rose and spoke, and the planter translated his speech for me. It was something in this fashion :

" Listen, my brothers. A great shame has come upon Siria this day, and my stomach aches at what the people of other lands will say and the mockery they will cast when they hear. This Turaga is a great

white man. Oh, a very great white man! He writes things in books. In many books. Also in the papers with pictures in them. Even now have your eyes seen the machine with which he makes the pictures. He writes things that are wise and true, and many people read those things and rejoice. They rejoice exceedingly. Everyone speaks of how great a man is he. He has sailed all the seas in the big steamer-ships, and has written down the things he has seen. In America the people speak his name continually, so great a man is he; and he sleeps in the house of he who is king. Many presents come to him. When he goes in the steamer-ship to Beretami, King George Number Five sends to him the women of his house laden with yams and bananas and kava roots the thickness of a man's leg. The best house is made ready for him. Oh, I tell you he is a great man!

"And now he comes to Siria. He comes to make the people of Siria proud of his presence amongst them. And what do the people of Siria do when this great Turaga is with them?

"One man—a man named Musilami—seeks to beg his trousers!

"*To beg his trousers!*

"It is a great shame that has come to Siria indeed. For the Turaga will put it down in his books, which all people read, that a man in the village of Siria tried to beg his trousers!

"And in the papers which have pictures will be the village where this thing happened. Truly has this man Musilami brought shame to his village. For many people will read, my brothers, and they will see the pictures. And they will laugh and speak in scorn of Siria. In Suva and Levuka will they laugh and talk and mock. On the beaches of Samoa will the news be passed from mouth to mouth. And many will ask: 'Who is this foolish man called Musilami who sought to beg the trousers of the great Turaga?' And others will ask: 'What kind of place is this Siria that its people do things like this? Truly must they be ignorant people.' And they will hear in Tahiti and in Lifu and in Tonga; and the singers will make new songs about the people of Siria. And the king of America will carry with him the book and the papers with the pictures that he may look often and laugh. And King George Number Five will ask that the Turaga tell with his lips the story of Musilami that he may hear with his own ears how a foolish man brought mockery on his village. Even now, before the news has gone forth, is my heart bowed and sore with the shame——"

He was interrupted by Musilami approaching on his knees and begging that the Turaga be asked to forgive him. He had not really meant to ask for the trousers, he said; it was only that he had been over-anxious to show his deep respect for the great white

man who honoured the village with his presence. He had admired the trousers and spoken so only that the Turaga might be pleased. Would the chief ask that the Turaga write not in the books of this foolishness of Musilami, who was so deeply sorry that his blood was as turned to water?

In keeping with my mythical importance I signified regally that the man was forgiven and the incident closed. Then Musilami smiled, the girls resumed their dancing, and the kava-cup started on its rounds once more.

And I, watching, concluded that in the matters of superstition, tradition and, above all, keen sensibility to scorn the man of the Palæolithic Wild and the man of the Civilized Wild were brothers all the while.

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